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President MA Ying-jeou
President, Republic of China
No. 122, Sec. 1, Chongqing S. Rd.
Zhongzheng District
Taipei City 100
Taiwan (R.O.C.)

Open Letter to President MA Ying-jeou of The Republic of China

China Rights Network Expresses Concern About Erosion of Human Rights in Taiwan

Dear President Ma,

Over the past fifteen years the world has come to view Taiwan as a place of hope, where human rights and democratic values became firmly established in the 1990's after many years of struggle. In recent weeks, however, we have grown increasingly concerned by reports from many groups and individuals. These include international scholars, Freedom House, Amnesty International and the Taiwanese Human Rights Association of Canada, a member of CRN. The China Rights Network is a coalition of Toronto-based groups concerned with issues of human rights in China. It is with great dismay that we now feel we must extend that concern to Taiwan as well.

These reports we see raise detailed concerns over the fairness and objectivity of procedures used in the prosecution of alleged corruption cases against former officials of the DPP government and the family of former President Chen. Other concerns have been raised about restrictions on freedom of expression and the actions of police against demonstrators during the visit of Chinese officials to Taiwan in early November.

Changes made at the Guomindang Extraordinary Congress in November, and President Ma's statements on November 22 about closer party state co-ordination, create anxiety about the possible re-emergence of a "party state". It is disturbing, for instance, that the Guomindang Party, rather than the government, is conducting negotiations with the Communist Party of China.

CHINA RIGHTS NETWORK

Falun Dafa Human Rights Association • Federation for a Democratic China • Students for a Free Tibet
Taiwanese Human Rights Association of Canada • Tibetan Women's Association of Ontario
Tibetan Youth Congress • Toronto Association for Democracy in China
Uyghur Canadian Association • World Federalists of Canada

Not only is this a departure from normal diplomatic practice, it also contradicts the longstanding policies of former presidents Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui, that the Guomindang would not engage in party to party negotiations with the CCP. The ongoing negotiations, and President Ma's recent statement that he would not welcome a visit by the Dalai Lama to Taiwan at this time, suggests that he is already being influenced by the PRC, despite assurances to the contrary.

Ironically, on December 10, International Human Rights Day, new developments suggest that all the above concerns are indeed serious, pushing us to take action. On December 10th, executives of Taiwan's Public Television Network (PTN), along with the Association of Taiwan Journalists, issued statements of alarm over moves by the legislature to assert political control over Taiwan's Public Television Network. In a move that extends political control, it is reported that more Guomindang legislators will be appointed to an expanded Board of Directors, and certain PTN programming will require advance approval from government departments.

In a further extension of authoritarian tendencies, at 4 a.m. on December 11th, police violently evicted the "Wild Strawberry" student protestors from Liberty Square, along with numerous Tibetans seeking political asylum in Taiwan, who were later dumped in an outlying part of Taipei.

The China Rights Network condemns these regressive moves by the Guomindang Party and government agencies in Taiwan. We are deeply concerned that these actions might indicate a growing Chinese Communist Party influence over Guomindang policies.

Human rights are the lifeblood of democracy, and democracy is vital to the just and peaceful development of Taiwan. We thus express our solidarity with the people and organizations that work to preserve Taiwan's hard-won commitment to democracy and human rights.

We applaud the recent statement by President Ma calling for the Guomindang-controlled legislature to ratify the UN Covenants on Human Rights. Further firm leadership and concrete action is urgently required to address all the above issues and prevent the erosion of human rights under your leadership.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Craig, Chair
China Rights Network

Michael Stainton, President
Taiwanese Human Rights Association
of Canada