

## Public fed up with ‘dinosaur judges’

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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Taiwan is no stranger to violent criminals being let off with lenient sentences, with another ridiculous ruling taking place last week.

Hsu Wen-ping (許文平), who was convicted of brutally murdering a friend and mutilating his body, had a life sentence reduced to 18 years, because he is an alcoholic who was intoxicated when the incident occurred.

The judges said Hsu qualified for a reduced term under Article 19 of the Criminal Code, which governs crimes committed by people with mental disorders and stipulates that “punishment may be reduced ... as a result of an obvious reduction in judgement.”

This is ludicrous. According to the judges’ reasoning, any crimes committed while intoxicated can be excused. Will every alcoholic who commits a crime from now on receive a reduced sentence? Should everyone start downing bottles of whiskey before going out and killing friends? This type of ruling handed down by so-called “dinosaur judges” is so mind-blowing that it would be easy to think that Taiwanese society cares more about criminals than the victims.

A quick search on the Internet will turn up countless similar cases, many of them taking place this year.

In April, a man who raped a mentally disabled girl avoided jail time, because the court “took mercy on him” as he was willing to reach a settlement with the family, admitted his crime, appeared to be remorseful and had no prior convictions.

In June, a man who raped his stepson received only a four-year jail term, because he paid the child to not cry during the act and allegedly did not use force. Simply unbelievable.

There is a limit to compassion. Taiwan does not have a public sex offender registry because of opposition from “human rights groups” when the law was being drafted a decade ago. There

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are so many oppressed and suffering people in Taiwan who need help, and this is evidence that some would prefer to fight for the rights of criminals.

Obviously, the public is fed up with this situation, as evidenced by an online petition urging the government to punish drunk drivers, sex offenders and child abusers by caning that surpassed the 5,000-signature threshold that warrants an official response.

Without endorsing this type of eye-for-eye punishment, the petition is a clear indicator that the nation's judicial system is broken and that people are resorting to desperate proposals. There is obviously something wrong, as evidenced by a five-time drunk driving offender who two weeks ago received an eight-month jail sentence, which was considered serious. In the four previous convictions, he was never "punished" for his misdeeds, as each time his sentence was commuted to a fine or community service. The eight-month sentence is pretty much a slap on the wrist for the five-time offender and is unlikely to cause a change in his behavior.

Does Taiwan really need to resort to caning people? With rulings such as these, it might have no other choice. Most disappointing perhaps is the government's response to the petition, with Premier William Lai (賴清德) saying that Taiwan is a democratic and law-abiding nation where human rights are valued. Yes, Taiwan is a nation that values human rights so much that it protects the identity of sex offenders, condones drunk driving, lets rapists go free and reduces the sentence for drunken murderers.

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