

Tomorrow marks the 71st anniversary of the 228 Massacre, a calamity in the nation's history that ushered in the White Terror era, during which many were imprisoned, tortured and killed.

While both the pan-blue and pan-green camps have held a series of events over the past few days to commemorate this tragic chapter, opinion about the truth behind it remains divided between two ends of the political spectrum.

Academia Sinica associate research fellow Chen Yi-shen (陳宜生) on Saturday said that probably about 20,000 people were killed, while some other historians estimate the casualties to have been up to 30,000.

On the other hand, former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Central Policy Committee director Alex Tsai (蔡正元) disputed the number, with Chunghwa Pan-Blue Alliance convener Lin Chung-shan (林重謨) saying that “only 862 died” during the Incident, and former KMT chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) on Sunday asking: “Is it really true that the government abused its power to kill innocent people?”

The issue of accountability for the 228 Massacre also remains divisive, with an investigative report titled 228 Incident: A Report on Responsibility, released in 2006 by a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)-sponsored truth commission, naming Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) as the prime culprit, while Tsai and others, as recently as on Sunday, still maintained that Chiang did nothing wrong.

These disputes — let alone questions that persist for the families of many victims who still do not know why their loved ones were killed or where their remains were buried — suggest that more research is needed into the Incident and its aftermath.

Regarding Hung's question and the remarks of other KMT politicians that more deliberation is needed to determine what exactly Chiang's responsibility was in the Incident, as well as a call issued by hundreds of people — including centenarian Taiwanese independence advocate Su Beng (蘇炳) — on Saturday in a march urging the government to uncover more truths about the 228 Incident, it is fair to say that a consensus does exist among pan-green and pan-blue

Working together to find the truth

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members: More work must be done to uncover the one and only historical truth.

There are certainly several measures that both the DPP government and the KMT can take toward reaching this goal.

First, the government needs to take swift action in implementing the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促進轉型正義法), which was passed on Dec. 5 last year. The law requires that the Executive Yuan set up a nine-member independent committee responsible for making political archives available and for investigating political persecution — among other measures set forth under the act.

However, no progress has been made in the formation of such a committee, other than an announcement that Minister Without Portfolio Lo Ping-cheng (洛秉成) has been put in charge of it.

In line with the act, the KMT, for its part, should take the initiative of providing unhindered access to its party archives and making documents related to the 228 Incident public.

Righting the Wrongs of the 228 Incident and Transitional Justice (平反二二八事件與轉型正義) editor Felicity Chiu (邱芳谷) noted recently that 228 Massacre victims are gradually passing away and that second-generation offspring who can pass on accounts of the tragedy are also aging, adding that “there is an urgent need to speed up the gathering of oral history from them.”

Time is of the essence in the work of uncovering the truth behind the 228 Massacre.

Instead of engaging in disputes, which only work to deepen the agony of the victims and their families, who yearn for truth and justice, both the governing party and the opposition should genuinely work together in unearthing the truth, together moving the nation toward reconciliation.

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