

Taiwan must speak up for itself

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The World Health Assembly (WHA), the decisionmaking body of the WHO, is to hold its annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, next month, but as of yesterday Taiwan had not received an invitation to the assembly as an observer.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) and Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) have offered a gloomy outlook on the likelihood of receiving an invitation, but said the government is not willing to give up trying to secure one.

The outlook might be bleak, but that does not mean Taiwan has an excuse to be pessimistic and give up without a fight.

China has been stepping up its efforts to suppress Taiwan in the international arena since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the Democratic Progressive Party took office in May 2016, as part of its attempts to pressure Tsai into recognizing the so-called “1992 consensus” as the sole foundation for cross-strait exchanges.

Some people, saying that Taiwan was able to attend the assembly as an observer for eight years during the administration of former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), have blamed the Tsai government for what they called deteriorating cross-strait relations that have led to Taiwan being rejected by the WHA.

However, they have totally overlooked that Taiwan was only able to attend those WHA gatherings under the ridiculous “Chinese Taipei” appellation. Taiwan’s WHA participation was “a special arrangement made through cross-strait negotiations” against the backdrop of mutual recognition of “one China” on Beijing’s terms.

In other words, the invitations locked Taiwan into the “one China” cage.

The right to health is a fundamental and universal right. On its own Web site, the WHO says that its ethical principles include “impartiality and independence from external sources and

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authorities,” and “respect for the dignity, worth, equality and diversity of all persons.”

That makes it doubly disappointing that the WHO has allowed itself to be held hostage by China and has shut out Taiwan, leaving a hole in the global epidemic prevention network.

The task might be daunting, but the government should make the international community aware of how the WHO, supposedly spearheading the promotion and protection of healthcare for all, is discriminating against Taiwan and neglecting the health rights of Taiwanese as well as foreigners living in this nation.

Chen said that if Taiwan does not receive an invitation, he would still take a delegation to Geneva to hold bilateral talks with nations attending the WHA and to publicize Taiwan’s medical skills and contributions.

For that, the officials deserve applause from the public for not giving up in the face of China’s incessant obstructionism.

The US House of Representatives in January passed H.R.3320, directing the US secretary of state to help Taiwan regain observer status in the WHO. This was an encouraging sign.

However, the government must continue making an appeal; only when Taiwan speaks up for its rights can it encourage others to voice their support for international participation.

Passivity and silence are exactly what Beijing is counting on to be able to continue blocking Taiwan internationally. If Taiwan stays silent, the international community might mistakenly believe that it is happy with its present treatment.

Making a loud noise is the way to go in fighting against China’s diplomatic blockade.

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