

A dead end to WHO participation

Written by Lin Shih-chia 林錫家
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According to media reports, WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier said: “If there is no ‘cross-strait understanding’ this year, it is not expected that an invitation to the WHA [World Health Assembly] will be issued” to Taiwan.

Lindmeier not only seriously overstepped the authority of the secretariat of an international organization, but his statement in many ways cannot be justified.

According to the WHO’s constitution, rules of procedure and related practices, the attendance as an observer of a political entity is up to the WHA or the director-general to decide.

When Taiwan attended the WHA as an observer for the first time in 2009, friendly members such as the US, Japan and the EU, as well as China, did not claim that Taiwan should only attend on the basis of a “political understanding.”

If a “political understanding” were truly needed to attend the WHA, given that other WHO member states have each year contributed more financially than China, is their support of Taiwan’s participation not equally as important as Beijing’s “political understanding”?

Or does it mean that the WHO has depreciated into a “China Health Organization”? Otherwise, how would it be possible for friendly nations such as the US and Japan to turn a deaf ear to this situation?

As the Asia-Pacific region faces the threat of infectious diseases such as African swine fever, each nation urgently needs to establish a seamless epidemic prevention network.

On top of that, Taiwan’s National Health Insurance system could serve as an example for other nations.

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The WHO has gone the extra mile to look for any excuse to exclude Taiwan.

Despite its exclusion, Taiwanese have still managed to establish an outstanding healthcare system and epidemic response mechanism. Overseas medical assistance of all forms has further proven that the nation is a responsible and indispensable contributor to global health.

These efforts cannot just be glossed over with a statement about the absence of a “cross-strait understanding.”

If a “cross-strait understanding” were to be discussed, it should include how severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, was imported from China to Taiwan without acquiring Taipei’s understanding. Now, African swine fever is spreading in China and many nearby countries are paying a huge price for their epidemic prevention work.

Hence, Taiwanese have a strong aversion to the WHO spokesman’s statement.

Regrettably, some members of the opposition have criticized President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) for harming the health of Taiwanese by insisting on maintaining her political ideology.

As China is now boycotting Taiwan over the Democratic Progressive Party’s rejection of the so-called “1992 consensus,” under China’s hegemonic thinking, to be invited to attend the WHA, should Taiwan not insist on its political ideology rather than accepting Chinese President Xi Jinping’s (习近平) “one country, two systems” formula?

The situation has also highlighted the malpractices of former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) administration, which relied on China’s “good intentions” for Taiwan’s international participation. Once China grows discontent with Taiwan, China can always shirk its responsibility to it, as happened with the WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organization.

As a result, the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) reliance on China’s goodwill and its

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collaboration with the Chinese Communist Party cannot be seen as a sustainable “strategy.”

Although Taiwan’s participation in intergovernmental organizations was difficult during the administrations of former presidents Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), Taiwan was gradually able to negotiate the right of membership and the use of its name through countless rounds of international negotiations, and has been able to participate despite changes in the ruling party.

It is obvious which diplomatic approach is better for Taiwan’s international participation. The premise of a “cross-strait understanding” would certainly be a dead end regarding Taiwan’s WHO participation.

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