

Taiwan cannot retreat on freedom of speech

Written by Taiwan News

Tuesday, 22 September 2009 09:11

We approve of the decision of the Kaohsiung City government to screen the Australian made documentary "The 10 Conditions of Love" about an exiled Uighur rights activist in the face of intense pressure from the authoritarian People's Republic of China and pro-China interests at home, but deeply regret its flawed decision to separate the showings from the upcoming Kaohsiung Film Festival, scheduled for Oct. 16-29 at the Kaohsiung Film Museum.

It is no secret that the Chinese Communist Party-ruled PRC has bitterly opposed the showing anywhere on the planet Earth of the documentary by Australian director Jeff Daniels on the life and struggle of World Uyghur Congress President Rebiya Kadeer, whom Beijing has labeled a "criminal."

In early August, Beijing engineered an intense campaign of opposition to the showing of "The 10 Conditions of Love" and the appearance by Kadeer herself at the Melbourne International Film Festival, but the campaign backfired as the MIFF and Australia's Labor Party government refused to back down and as tickets for "Ten Conditions" quickly sold out.

The decision by the KFF to screen the documentary next month was therefore widely welcomed by the artistic community, movie lovers and human rights groups, but likewise sparked a similar assault by the PRC regime, together with pro-China economic and political interests in Taiwan.

Moreover, local news media claimed that hotel operators in Kaohsiung City put pressure on the DPP city government based on unconfirmed claims to have suffered mass cancellations of reservations by packaged tours of Chinese tourists due to orders by PRC authorities to temporarily avoid the southern port city.

Besides criticism in pro-China news media, which are now transparently upholding the CCP's values, newly appointed KMT Premier Wu Den-yih openly chided the DPP Kaohsiung City government Friday by saying that "if you want me to buy goods at your place more often but you do things that make me feel uncomfortable, then I will not go to your store."

With such remarks, the KMT government confirmed that it places a higher value on money over fundamental freedoms and human rights and elevates "the feelings of the Chinese people" far

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above the feelings of the Taiwan people whom it is supposed to be representing and that it has abrogated its responsibility to defend our country's sovereignty and the basic freedoms and interests of our citizens against open interference by a hostile power.

No compromise on human rights

To our regret, the DPP administration in Kaohsiung City attempted to square the circle and ease the pressure with a compromise solution Saturday by announcing that the four showings of the "The 10 Conditions of Love" scheduled for the KFF in October would be advanced to Tuesday and Wednesday.

On the positive side, the decision defended the KFF's right to screen and the right of the Taiwan people to see the film despite Beijing's vicious campaign and Kaohsiung movie lovers responded by quickly buying up the available tickets.

However, this decision also signified acknowledgement of the effectiveness of pressure from the PRC and other anti-democratic forces. As a result, the DPP Kaohsiung City government, whose mayor has been a stalwart of the human rights movement, retreated from the defense of "100 percent freedom of speech" and use state power to interfere in the exercise of the freedom of expression.

Thanks to this decision, the CCP regime achieved at least part of its long-range strategic objective to force the Taiwan government, at all levels, to act as its agent in enforcing the standards of human rights and freedoms maintained in the PRC in Taiwan.

The decision prompted two Taiwan directors of two human rights films, "A Burning Mission-Rescue the Political Prisoners of Taiwan" and "My Human Rights Journey," to withdrawal from the KFF to protest the failure to defend artistic autonomy and professionalism.

"Freedom, democracy and human rights are the proudest achievements of the Taiwan people and with their loss, we will lose our most precious values," wrote Chen Li-kui and Chen Yu-ching in an open letter to Chen Chu issued Monday.

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Ironically, the "compromise" has not eased the PRC's campaign but sparked a rare immediate public condemnation by the PRC Taiwan Affairs Office Sunday and a hacker attack which crashed the KFF website with a picture of Kadeer and the Dalai Lama together and a host of insults and declarations of "resolution opposition" to Tibetan, Uighur, not to be forgotten, Taiwan independence.

We urge Mayor Chen Chu to realize that Taiwan cannot afford any retreat from full freedom of speech in the face of PRC political and commercial pressure and to restore the planned showings of "The 10 Conditions of Love" in the KFF in October.

In addition, we urge the DPP to implement its plan to arrange showings of the Kadeer documentary in all cities and counties in Taiwan and thus show Beijing and its local agents the bankruptcy of their attempt to reimpose martial law on the minds of the Taiwan people.

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