

Dapu farmland owner's funeral draws over 1,000

Written by Taipei Times
Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:23 -

Over 1,000 people from more than 10 farming and human rights advocacy groups across the country attended the funeral of 72-year-old Chu Feng Min (許鳳敏), who allegedly committed suicide earlier this month to protest land seizures by the government.

Chu Feng, a native of Dapu Borough (大埔), Jhunan Township (竹南), Miaoli County, was found dead on a chair on the porch of her house after swallowing a bottle of insecticide without leaving a suicide note behind on the morning of Aug. 3.

Her family said that she began to suffer from depression after she learned that her farmland of approximately 1,000m² was to be seized by the county government for an expansion project of the Jhunan Science Park.

Before committing suicide, Chu Feng often said that when her farmland was gone, her life would be hopeless, her sister-in-law said.

Non-Partisan Solidarity Union Legislator Kang Shih-ju (康希九), who was elected from the constituency, accused the central government of failing to help the farmers and panned the county government for what he called its iron-fisted seizure of Dapu farmlands.

Despite controversies surrounding the land expropriation project and the refusal of some farmers to hand over land ownership, the county government insisted that it had completed all the legally required processes to transfer land ownership and sent in excavators several times since early June to dig up farmland and destroy crops.

Although several politicians from the opposition attended the funeral, neither the county nor central governments sent a representative.

In a written statement, the Dapu Farmers' Self-Help Association urged lawmakers and the government to revise the Land Expropriation Act (土地徵收法).

"The current Land Expropriation Act is unfair and unjust to property owners, and the review process [for land seizure] is non-transparent," the statement said. "All political parties should take the issue seriously and quickly revise the law to protect the public's rights to survival, to work and to property."

Separately, yesterday, National Taipei University's Department of Real Estate and Built Environment associate professor Liao Pen-chuan (廖奔川), who is also a member of the Taiwan Rural Front, said that Chu Feng's case may not be an isolated one.

"As far as I know, a farmer surnamed Hsieh [許] in Houli Township (後里), Taichung County, also attempted suicide several times after his farm was seized by the government for the Central Taiwan Science Park," Liao told a forum on land expropriation. "Tragedies will continue to

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happen if we don't stop land seizures like this.”

“When the government and the corporations join forces, we can only challenge them if we the people stand up and act,” he added.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/08/22](#)