

China blocks NGO chairman from UN

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Tseng Min-chieh, chairman of Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders, right, is pictured in an undated photograph.

Photo provided by Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders

A Taiwan non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to the treatment of rare diseases was barred from a UN-affiliated meeting in New York because of a protest from China.

Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders chairman Tseng Min-chieh (曾民奇) was invited to the NGO Committee for Rare Diseases launch on Friday to talk about how Taiwan can contribute to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, Swedish National Competence Centre for Rare Diseases president Robert Hejdenberg told Tseng one hour before the meeting that he would not be able to deliver his speech because of an objection from Beijing, the foundation said in a statement.

The foundation quoted a letter from the meeting's cohost, European Organisation for Rare Diseases chief executive Yann Le Cam, saying: "We are all outraged and feel awful for today's difficulties."

The Ministry of Health and Welfare yesterday condemned China's behavior as "very unreasonable."

Taiwan will try to attend as many international organizations or conferences as possible, especially on issues such as healthcare and human rights, Health Promotion Administration Director Wang Ying-wei (王英偉) said on behalf of the ministry.

Taiwan has put much effort into taking care of minority groups throughout the years and places

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a high value on human rights, he said, adding that the speech had nothing to do with politics, but was about universal human rights.

“We cannot even make a speech, which highlights Beijing’s very unreasonable attitude,” Wang said. “However, we still reached out and at least it showed the world our healthcare achievements, and how unreasonably we are treated.”

During the meeting, Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CONGO) president Cyril Ritchie said: “CONGO regrets that one of the speakers of today’s program was not able to enter UN headquarters. I refer to professor Tseng Min-chieh, founder of the Foundation and dean of Social sciences at National Taipei University.”

“CONGO by definition is a proponent of freedom of information, freedom of expression and the open exchange of scientific and professional knowledge. The prevention of professor Tseng from Taiwan from attending today’s CONGO meeting runs directly counter to these fundamental principles; principles that are clearly within the values proclaimed in the UN Charter,” he said.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it is sorry that Taiwan could not attend a meeting where the goal is to enhance relationships among medical non-governmental organizations and the UN.

The Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York contacted Tseng immediately after the incident to learn more about the incident and provide assistance, it said.

Additional reporting by Peng Wen-hsin

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