

Groups march to urge action over Lee Ming-che

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A blindfolded and shackled protester yesterday takes part in a march through the streets of Taipei by a coalition of human rights groups to mark the anniversary of the abduction by Chinese authorities of Taiwanese democracy advocate Lee Ming-che.

Photo: Huang Yao-cheng, Taipei Times

A coalition of human rights groups yesterday marched on the streets of Taipei to mark the anniversary of China's abduction of Taiwanese democracy advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) and to urge the Taiwanese government to pressure Beijing for Lee's release.

Lee, who was arrested by Chinese authorities on March 19 last year when entering Zhuhai in Guangdong Province from Macau, was sentenced to five years in prison for state subversion in November last year. He is being incarcerated in Chishan Prison in China's Hunan Province, but his wife, Lee Ching-yu (李靜瑜), is unable to make family visits.

Starting from the Presidential Office Building in Taipei, the activists marched with one of them blindfolded and hands shackled to symbolize Lee's imprisonment, while they explained to passersby Lee's situation and how he was incarcerated for exercising freedom of speech.

In a letter sent to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and top government officials, they urged the government to redouble its efforts to pressure Beijing to release Lee Ming-che, while it continues to deepen Taiwan's democracy to counter Chinese aggression.

The Taiwanese government is passive in its handling of Lee Ming-che's abduction, with newly sworn-in Mainland Affairs Council Minister Chen Ming-tong (陳明通) completely quiet about the case, Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu Ee-ling (邱毅) said.

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“Each one of us is Lee Ming-che” because he was convicted for making democracy-promoting comments on the Internet, something that every Taiwanese would do, Amnesty International Taiwan director Lin Shu-ya (林淑雅) said.

China has approved a set of laws authorizing law enforcement agencies to arbitrarily detain its citizens and people from other countries, which represses China’s civil development and deprives people of their right to free speech, Lin said.

China’s arbitrary arrest of a Taiwanese is an infringement of the nation’s sovereignty and the human rights of its people, Taiwan Association of University Professors president Lin Hsiu-hsin (林錫山) said.

“[Lee Ming-che’s case] poses a double threat as Taiwanese are prohibited from promoting human rights in China or making online comments in Taiwan,” Lin Hsiu-hsin said. “China is imposing its imperialism on the world, and Taiwan is its softest and easiest target.”

Taiwan Forever Association deputy director Hung Chung-yen (洪中嚴) said the only way to counter China’s infringement of Taiwan’s democracy is to deepen its democracy.

“China has shown us the only way to resist its authoritarian government,” Hung said. “It is what Lee Ming-che did: promoting freedom of speech and democracy, resisting human rights violations and organizing human rights defenders and democracy activists.”

Covenants Watch chief executive officer Huang Yi-bee (黃怡蓀) said that activists on Friday last week submitted a petition to the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, urging the council to pressure China to ensure Lee Ming-che’s right to family visits.

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