

Lee Ching-yu asked to State of the Union event

Written by Taipei Times

Wednesday, 06 February 2019 06:14 -



Lee Ching-yu sits in front of a poster featuring a photograph of her husband, Lee Ming-che, at a Taipei news conference on Tuesday last week.

Photo: Huang Yao-cheng, Taipei Times

Lee Ching-yu (李靜瑜), wife of Taiwanese democracy advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), was invited to attend US President Donald Trump's State of the Union address last night in Washington.

US Representative Chris Smith invited Lee Ching-yu to attend the address at the US Capitol, said Taiwan Association for China Human Rights chairman Yang Hsien-hung (楊憲宏), who is accompanying her on a week-long trip to the US to raise awareness about China's imprisonment of her husband.

Smith's invitation underscored the weight the US places on the infringement of the human rights of Taiwanese, Yang said.

Tradition allows the 535 members of the US Congress to invite people to accompany them to the annual State of the Union address who symbolize policy goals and bring attention to the

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causes they favor.

Lee Ching-yu's visit to the US is made in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, Item C, Section 2, which states that the preservation and enhancement of the human rights of Taiwanese are objectives of the US.

Lee Ming-che in November 2017 was sentenced to five years in prison after being convicted of "subversion of state power" and is serving his sentence in Chishan Prison in Hunan Province.

Following a visit to see her husband in December last year, Lee Ching-yu was last month banned from further visits until April 22 after prison officials said her comments about his mistreatment by prison authorities "deviated from the facts."

As the Lunar New Year holiday is traditionally a time for family reunions, the association asked the public to tag Lee Ming-che on Facebook during their holiday to show him that he is not alone.

During a meeting in Washington on Monday with Lee Ching-yu, National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman wrote a letter to Lee Ming-che as a show of support for him.

Among those invited by lawmakers to attend last night's speech were Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad.

Murad was invited by US Representative Jeff Fortenberry, while US Senator Marco Rubio invited Carlos Vecchio, Venezuelan National Assembly President Juan Guaido's envoy to Washington.

US Senator Jeff Merkeley was to be accompanied by a Guatemalan mother and daughter who were separated at the Mexico border last year, while some Republican lawmakers invited US

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border patrol agents.

Additional reporting by AFP.

Source: Taipei Times - 2019/02/06