

## Viral Outbreak: US pans UN over Taiwan's exclusion amid virus fight

Written by Taipei Times

Monday, 03 February 2020 06:35 - Last Updated Monday, 03 February 2020 06:59

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A petition calling on the US to help Taiwan be included in the WHO that was initiated on Thursday yesterday reached the 100,000-signature threshold, requiring an official response.

**Photo: US White House Web site**

The US Department of State and several prominent US politicians have criticized international organizations for excluding Taiwan amid a global effort to curb the spread of a new coronavirus.

The WHO on Thursday declared the virus a public health emergency of international concern, but did not permit Taiwan to attend emergency briefings about the virus even though there are 10 confirmed cases in the nation.

US senators, including Mitt Romney and Cory Gardner, said China has placed pressure on UN-related agencies, such as the WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), as well as the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), to exclude Taiwan from discussions, and called instead for Taiwan's immediate inclusion.

Japan, Canada, the EU and other world powers in the past week have also renewed their support for Taiwan's inclusion in the annual World Health Assembly, the WHO's decisionmaking body, as an observer amid the outbreak.

The US State Department on Saturday criticized the ICAO for allegedly blocking users on Twitter who refer to Taiwan's non-participation in the organization.

"Taiwan has a relevant and credible voice on transnational health issues, and the United States

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has long supported its active engagement in international venues, including ICAO, where its expertise can be beneficial," US Department of State spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

"We call upon ICAO to immediately and permanently reverse its practice of blocking discussion of Taiwan on its Twitter properties and make clear publicly its understanding that freedom of expression must always supersede the political insecurities of member states," she said.

The ICAO denied blocking Twitter users.

In related developments, a petition submitted to a White House Web site that calls on the US to help Taiwan be included in the WHO has reached the required threshold to warrant an official response.

The petition, initiated on Thursday by someone identified only as "C.C.," had collected more than 120,000 signatures as of 2pm yesterday.

According to the rules of the "We the People" Web site, a petition needs to gain at least 100,000 signatures within 30 days to obtain a White House review and response.

The White House says it usually gives a response within 60 days, but it could take longer, depending on the issue and the volume of petitions submitted.

The person who initiated the petition said Taiwan has "high-quality medical technology and abundant medical experiences and has been contributing to medical issues continuously."

"However, Taiwan has always been precluded from WHO due to China's opposition and pressure, which made Taiwan unable to access timely information from WHO at SARS outbreak," the petition said.

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Taiwan is standing “at the first line of defense” during the new coronavirus outbreak, so it should not be excluded from the WHO for political reasons, for the sake of Taiwan's 23 million people and global safety, the petition added.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2020/02/03](#)