

Virus Outbreak: US, China clash over Taiwan at WHO

Written by Taipei Times

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US Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Andrew Bremberg, center, speaks at a news conference at the European headquarters of the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, on Wednesday.

Photo: EPA-EFE

The US yesterday urged the WHO to “engage directly with Taiwan public health authorities” in the fight against the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

“For the rapidly evolving coronavirus, it is a technical imperative that WHO present visible public health data on Taiwan as an affected area and engage directly with Taiwan public health authorities on actions,” US Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Andrew Bremberg told the WHO’s executive board.

Japan and the EU appeared to support this.

Japanese Ambassador Ken Okaniwa told the forum: “We should not make a geographical vacuum by creating a situation where a specific region cannot join WHO even as an observer.”

The board was meeting yesterday to discuss how to deal with health emergencies. Taiwan is not a WHO member because of China’s objections and Beijing says that Taiwan is adequately represented in the organization by China.

A counselor with the Chinese UN mission in Geneva, Qi Daihai (齐戴海), took the floor to express Beijing’s “strong dissatisfaction” that some countries had raised the issue of Taiwan’s participation at the technical meeting.

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There is ample cooperation between China and Taiwan on the outbreak and "we feel that the Chinese central government can say it is very sincere in protecting the health and well-being of Taiwan compatriots," Qi said.

"I would like to reiterate that Taiwan is part of China, this fact cannot be changed," he said.

"China requests that the relevant countries should respect the guidance of the chairman to strictly abide by the rules of procedure of the conference," Qi said.

"Stop hyping-up about the so-called Taiwan issue. Don't waste our time," he added.

The call by Bremberg and others came as the WHO pressed member countries affected by 2019-nCoV to share more information on cases, saying a shortage of details has hampered efforts to combat the outbreak.

The WHO on Tuesday said that it had received complete reports for only about 38 percent of coronavirus cases reported outside of China.

Since then, "the number of countries we've received comprehensive data from is improving, but not complete," WHO Health Emergencies Program executive director Mike Ryan told a news conference in Geneva on Wednesday.

Earlier yesterday in Taipei, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) took to Twitter to criticize the WHO for repeatedly giving Taiwan "inappropriate designations."

"@WHO, what's wrong with you? First you called us 'Taiwan, China,' then you changed to 'Taipei.' You misreported the confirmed cases, & now you call us 'Taipei & Environs,'" Wu wrote.

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“Look! Taiwan is #Taiwan & not any part of the #PRC,” he wrote.

Meanwhile, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐陽) told a news conference that the WHO’s “series of inappropriate designations” of Taiwan were “unfactual” and “absurd.”

“We expressed our solemn protest to the WHO after Taiwan’s objection with regards to the matter through its representative office in Geneva and several other channels was ignored,” she said, adding that Taiwan would continue to demand a correction.

The 16th edition of the WHO Novel Coronavirus Situation Report, issued on Wednesday, referred to Taiwan as “Taipei and environs” under a table of confirmed cases of the coronavirus reported by provinces, regions and cities in China.

The second situation report, issued on Jan. 22, referred to the nation as “Taiwan, China,” but on Jan. 23 the designation became “Taipei municipality,” then “Taipei” on Jan. 25, the ministry said.

“I’d like to ask the WHO, how many times are you going to change Taiwan’s name? These are not our correct names. Let me reiterate — our name is Taiwan, whose formal name is the Republic of China,” Ou said.

“We beseech the WHO not to put Taiwan’s information under China, creating mistake after mistake after mistake,” she said.

Ou blamed China for the WHO on Tuesday reporting that Taiwan had 13 confirmed 2019-nCoV cases, when it had just 10.

“This was incorrect information that was provided by China, which created the mistake,” she

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said.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a faxed statement to Reuters, said the case numbers it reported to the WHO for Taiwan all came from Taiwan's government.

"If there are mistakes, this is the relevant authorities in the Taiwan region deliberately reporting mistakes to us," it said.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office also said in a statement yesterday that Taiwan should not "use the virus to plot independence," and reiterated that Taiwan faced no problem with technical cooperation with the WHO.

Additional reporting by Bloomberg and CNA

This story has been updated since it was first published.

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