

Restricting freedom of expression in Taiwan

Written by The Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights
Sunday, 12 July 2009 10:42

The Chinese government arrested one of the originators of Charter 08, dissident and Tiananmen pro-democracy movement veteran Liu Xiaobo, on the grounds that he was instigating the overthrow of the government. We find it very upsetting that China, which keeps talking about its “peaceful rise,” would employ such measures to deal with an unarmed academic.

Democracies around the world immediately criticized the Chinese government for undermining human rights and suppressing freedom of speech. In Hong Kong, a mass protest was staged on July 1, with people gathering in support of Liu, including human rights lawyers, dissidents and others who have suffered political persecution in China. As a Taiwanese advocacy group with a deep concern for democracy and human rights, we join in the support for these people.

We do not only want to express our support for Liu or the many Chinese who have been robbed of their freedom of speech and religion, but also our concern that a similar situation is developing here in Taiwan. Lin Chia-fan, a professor at National Taiwan Normal University, and Lee Ming-tsung, an associate professor of sociology at National Taiwan University, were both recently charged under the Assembly and Parade Act.

In addition, many proposed amendments to the Act Governing the Administrative Impartiality of Public Officials and the Educational Fundamental Act that would restrict the rights of public servants and teachers to participate in politics are very worrying and point to increasing measures aimed at limiting freedom of expression.

We must ask whether Taiwan’s human rights standards will soon become integrated with China’s anti-human rights policies to bring about unification.

To prevent this nightmare from becoming reality, civic groups that strive to protect democracy and human rights in Taiwan have set up the Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights to call on the public and groups who care about freedom, democracy and human rights here and abroad to come together and take action to stop the deterioration of Taiwan’s democracy.

We think that since the bloody clashes that occurred in November when Chinese envoy Chen Yunlin visited Taiwan, the authorities have carried out numerous legal amendments and administrative measures to restrict human rights without paying attention to public opinion. Trials have been openly conducted in ways contradictory to the principle of rule of law, leaving the public with the feeling that the government is on a political manhunt and conducting a “liquidation” of members of the former government. Such “developments” have dealt a massive blow to the self-confidence and sense of pride Taiwanese have developed as a result of democratization.

We believe that anybody who believes in human rights will not accept suppression by the state of people with differing political opinions. This is why we solemnly urge the Chinese

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government to stop persecuting Liu and others like him.

In regards to Taiwan, we believe the Assembly and Parade Act is unconstitutional and the judiciary should therefore declare Lin and Lee not guilty.

We also believe that proposed clauses in the Act Governing the Administrative Impartiality of Public Officials involving the use of improper means to suppress the civil right to participate in politics should be immediately revised in order to truly put the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that President Ma Ying-jeou recently signed.

□ TRANSLATED BY DREW CAMERON

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