

Human rights violated

Written by Tiffany Hsiao
Friday, 03 May 2013 08:21

American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Ray Burghardt, was reported to have said that “he did not buy the scenario” that the human rights situation or democracy within Taiwan had eroded over the last few years (“US has never interfered in Taiwan-China talks,” April 25, page 3). I wish the reporter, William Lowther, had pressed further to get exactly what “scenario” Burghardt was referring to?

Freedom House did tout Taiwan as one of the better countries in Asia with respect to human rights.

However, I would like to illustrate several incidents in which governmental action or inaction posed ostensible human rights violations.

First, in 2008, during the visit of former Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait chairman Chen Yunlin (陳雲林), police brutality against Taiwanese protesters was rampant and widely reported in the media. President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) administration prohibited the public display of the national flag and many students were either beaten or arrested for holding the flag.

In 2009, during devastating Typhoon Morakot, Ma failed to declare a state of emergency. He not only failed to fully mobilize the rescue effort, but also initially declined foreign aid, thereby possibly adding to the numbers of casualties and deaths. He was dubbed the worst president ever by TVBS, a TV station known to be loyal to Ma.

Between 2009 and 2010, under the guise of “H1N1 preparedness,” an H1N1 avian influenza vaccine was marketed by a company that had not previously produced any flu vaccine, whose president happened to be the vice chairperson of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and under an expedited regulatory process without adequate clinical trials.

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After launching a mass vaccination program, adverse events, including several deaths, were obviously higher than other countries. Government officials have consistently claimed that those were unrelated to the vaccine. However, public outrage and panic erupted when a seven-year-old boy, the son of a gynecologist, died after receiving the vaccine. Still, the government denied any responsibility, and the victims of the vaccine injury have not been adequately compensated.

In 2011, a former airman Chiang Kuo Ching (蔣國興), who had been executed for an alleged murder, was exonerated. However, not one single person in the military was held accountable for the wrongful death of Chiang.

During last year's presidential election, then-Council of Economic Planning and Development minister Christine Liu (劉松藩) altered government papers to smear the Democratic Progressive Party's presidential candidate, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), which was a blatant violation of the law. Yet when Tsai pressed charges after the election, Liu was quickly found not guilty.

It seems apparent to me that all of the above incidents have infringed upon basic human rights and should not have happened in a democratic society. I would like to know Burghardt's response regarding these scenarios.

If Burghardt is interested in understanding the current situation of human rights and democracy, I could raise other examples for his insight.

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