

Ma must uphold human rights pledge

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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When it comes to cross-strait affairs and policies, similarities are hard to find between the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), except for one thing: human rights.

Administrations under the two parties both emphasized human rights as one of their core values and said Taiwan's advocacy for human rights and democracy could serve as an example and model for the Chinese Communist Party regime.

Therefore, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) should immediately call for the release of the "China 18," as well as tens of thousands of political dissidents, Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans and Uighurs imprisoned in China.

The "China 18" campaign was launched in June by several US-based human rights groups urging Beijing to release 16 — and later 18 — prisoners of conscience.

Public hearings have been held at the Legislative Yuan, as well as the US Congress, with families of those prisoners, many of them sentenced to life terms, appealing for public attention and assistance. A US congressional subcommittee urged Ma to help free the dissidents, in particular Wang Bingzhang (王炳章), who was accused of spying for Taiwan.

Wang, 66, was sentenced following a secret trial in 2003 by the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court in Guangdong Province for various offenses, including allegedly passing military secrets to Taiwan.

If Wang, a physician, did spy for Taiwan, the government would be responsible for rescuing him from his Chinese prison via all available channels, including direct negotiations. If Wang never spied for Taiwan, Ma is obligated to offer a clear explanation and call for Beijing to immediately release him.

Ma has always cited the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as one of his biggest achievements. He has also boasted about the state of cross-strait relations under his administration, saying that they have been the best in six decades because of his ability to lower bilateral tensions.

Unfortunately, the human rights situation in Taiwan has been going backward since Ma took office, as shown by the way his administration has treated protesters. Ma has also basically stayed silent about China's infringement of human rights.

Ma has turned a blind eye to China's crackdown on social unrest, as well as the rights movements in Tibet and Xinjiang. He even turned his back on his own citizens, ignoring thousands of cases involving kidnappings, murders and investment disputes of China-based Taiwanese businesspeople.

What is worse is that Ma has even praised Beijing, saying it has improved its human rights record.

If Ma, who has always boasted of abiding by the Republic of China (ROC) Constitution, truly believes that the "mainland" area and Taiwan are both ROC territory, he has betrayed his citizens on both sides of the Taiwan Strait with his inaction on human rights.

The truth is that Ma has been a moral dwarf when it comes to China's human rights violations and has, at best, offered lip service to human rights in general.

After a previous resolution called for the release of 4,033 political prisoners in China earlier this year, the legislature once again endorsed the appeal of the families of Chinese political prisoners this past week.

However, the key individual for a Taiwanese response is still Ma. The global appeal campaign will be another test of his commitment to uphold human rights as, in his own words, one of the most important core values for himself and for all Taiwanese.

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