

Taiwan's struggle to be recognized

Written by Lin Shih-chia 林希佳

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During the Ebola epidemic last year, Taiwan had no way of contributing to the aid effort under way in Africa in any official capacity. After the earthquakes in Nepal last month, the Nepalese government initially refused assistance from the government.

In March, the WHO updated the International Health Regulations list of authorized ports and harbors, with Taiwanese ports still listed as in China. This year also coincided with the end of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, and the world's governments are now negotiating draft sustainable development goals for the post-2015 development agenda, a discussion from which Taiwan has been excluded.

As the UN Development Program launches a variety of mechanisms to collect opinions on the issue of "The Future We Want" as part of the research following the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development — also known as Rio+20 — the debate should trigger self-reflection among Taiwanese, who must ask themselves what they want.

The World Health Assembly (WHA) met for the 68th time from Monday last week through yesterday.

Since 2009, Taiwan has attended the meetings as an observer, as it did for the seventh consecutive year this time. Minister of Health and Welfare Chiang Been-huang (蔣經國) led the Taiwanese delegation and gave a plenary speech for the first time since he was appointed. A press release said that the Taiwanese delegation had a fruitful exchange of experiences in its seventh year of attendance.

However, each year, Taiwan has to wait for a special invitation from the WHO secretary-general to confirm its participation in the meeting, Taiwanese are still required to show a Republic of China (ROC) passport and a certificate written in Chinese with a photograph.

What use is an ROC passport when Taiwanese are the only people required to provide two documents? Under the memorandum of understanding signed by China and the WHO in 2005, Taiwan is listed in the WHO's internal documentation as "Taiwan, Province of China."

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The “Procedures Concerning an Arrangement to Facilitate Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) with Respect to the Taiwan Province of China” announced by the WHO on Sept. 14, 2010, said that Taiwan is a “province of China” and cannot become a signatory to the International Health Regulations.

In October of the same year, confidential WHO documents requested that each member state recognize that “Taiwan is a province of China,” and the designation “Chinese Taipei” was only used during the five-day WHA meeting.

Taiwan is unable to join other global health treaties and cooperative frameworks. In 2013, the US Department of State's report to US Congress indicated that Washington supports Taiwan's meaningful participation in WHO working groups and technological conferences, including the Stop TB Partnership, Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System, the WHO's Western Pacific Regional office, the International Network of Food Safety Authorities and the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework.

Although the US says that Taiwan is ready to contribute to these partnerships and is concerned over the nation's substantive participation in them, Taiwan is still not a member of the five bodies. Participation in technological conferences remains limited to less than 10 due to the memorandum of understanding. Therefore, the report says that overall, the level of Taiwan's participation in technological conferences remains unsatisfactory.

In addition, the EU, which has always supported Taiwan's substantive participation in the WHO, has also expressed dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed by the world health body.

After seven years of participation and exposure to various forms of pressure, there is no doubt that observer status is more than a simple demotion in name only, it is also a real barrier to participation.

Taiwan existence in the international sphere is contingent on the 2005 memorandum, and

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documents signed by China and the WHO.

However, there is no doubt that what the government calls the “WHA model” is the result of the “one China” principle that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) insists on, which arose from the so-called “1992 consensus” that the CCP and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) uphold, which is a betrayal of the national interest born of expediency.

The idea that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to “one China” — as was stressed during the meeting between KMT Chairman Eric Chu (吳敦義) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) — means that Taiwan's international participation is set to face the same problems that are apparent in the “WHA model.”

This model has the potential to lock in restrictions on the nation's effort to gain the recognition of international organizations. It should be discarded immediately.

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Translated by Zane Kheir

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