

A joint research team from Chang Gung University and Taipei Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in August last year discovered the pathogenesis of anti-interferon-gamma autoantibodies; the National Health Research Institutes and Taichung Veterans General Hospital last year offered insight into the cause of type 2 diabetes, finding inflamed T cells that might cause diabetes and obesity; Academia Sinica researchers last year made a breakthrough that could help treat the mutation of a gene responsible for 90 percent of Rett syndrome cases; and another group of Academia Sinica researchers last year discovered a curcumin derivative that might help prevent Alzheimer's disease. These are just some examples of Taiwan's world-class medical achievements, breakthroughs and international contributions.

Having been on the receiving end of the international community's assistance eradicating several communicable diseases, Taiwan, now a nation with advanced medicine and healthcare, is eager to contribute to better global health.

However, its eagerness has been rejected by the WHO.

The World Health Assembly (WHA), the organization's highest decisionmaking body, is to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 22 to 31 and yesterday was the last day for online registration to the annual conference. As of press time last night, Taiwan had not been invited.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office Minister Zhang Zhijun (張志軍) yesterday said that so long as Taiwan refuses "the fundamental condition," which he described as the recognition of the "one China" principle and the so-called "1992 consensus," there is no basis for Taiwan's participation in the WHA, or other international organizations for that matter.

While China's bullying is reprehensible, it is just as disappointing to see that the WHO is indifferent to the fact that its autonomy has been usurped by China.

The WHO's objective is "to build a better, healthier future for people all over the world," its Web site says. It says that it "remains firmly committed to the principles set out in the preamble to the Constitution. Among the principles enshrined in the WHO Constitution include: The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every

WHO usurped by China

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human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition; The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent on the fullest co-operation of individuals and States; The achievement of any State in the promotion and protection of health is of value to all; and Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of diseases, especially communicable disease, is a common danger.”

Against the backdrop of its mission and constitution, is the WHO being hypocritical? Why is an international organization spearheading the global response to epidemic prevention allowing China to hold health concerns of 23 million people in Taiwan to ransom?

Those who argue that Taiwan is not a “state” and therefore cannot taken part in the WHO should know that statehood is not required for observer status to the WHA and related bodies.

By yielding to China, the WHO is jeopardizing the global epidemic prevention network; by discriminating against Taiwan, the WHO is essentially allowing the global healthcare network to be broken, especially since Taiwan is in such close proximity to China, which is notorious for concealing epidemics.

The WHO said its ethical principles include “impartiality and independence from external sources and authorities,” and “respect for the dignity, worth, equality, and diversity of all persons.”

If only WHO officials know how ironic these words are.

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