

The Siraya's call for recognition

Written by Tabatha Keton
Monday, 23 September 2019 05:59

The Siraya people are losing faith that President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration will fulfill its promise of officially recognizing them before next year's elections.

Since Tsai took office and apologized for the historical treatment of Aborigines, the Siraya (a subsection of the Pingpu) have waited for her to fulfill her promise of officially recognizing them.

In October 2017, the Executive Yuan approved an amendment to the Status Act for Indigenous Peoples (原住民族基本法) that would recognize the Pingpu as indigenous people. For almost two years, it has languished in the Legislative Yuan without a vote.

Tsai and Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) have both issued statements in support of the Siraya, but little has been done to approve the amendment

The priority items for the last legislative session of the year do not include the amendment to the act, despite Tsai's promise on June 18 that it would be a top priority.

The Siraya are looking for further guidance from their leadership, as this session represents their last attempt at official recognition before next year's elections.

For the past 20 years, the Siraya have been working tirelessly to revitalize their language and assert their rights under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

They have succeeded in being recognized as an official indigenous group by the former Tainan county, and as of May last year, the Supreme Administrative Court acknowledged them as an indigenous group of Taiwan.

For the Siraya, Tsai was "a light in a dark tunnel," Tainan Siraya Culture Association committee

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member Uma Talavan (烏瑪) said.

They had high hopes that all of their efforts would finally be recognized by the national government.

Now, Uma said that “the outlook has become foggy.”

On Aug. 26, Uma and two Pingpu representatives met with Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus convener Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) to discuss the Pingpu's recognition efforts. Despite his interest in the Pingpu struggle, he could not promise to prioritize the issue in the next legislative session.

Since the meeting took place, Uma has been contacted by various Siraya communities concerned that they will not be recognized before the next elections. They are looking for guidance as to what their next steps should be.

Many of these communities are starting to lose faith that Tsai will deliver on her promise of official recognition. The Siraya plan to protest as the last legislative session begins to encourage the Tsai administration to make right on their promise and to officially recognize the Pingpu before the elections.

A petition has been created to demonstrate the worldwide support for the Siraya and Pingpu's identity recognition efforts.

Tabatha Keton is a graduate student from the University of California, Los Angeles. She began working with the Siraya in 2014.

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