

US office renaming needs support

Written by Tommy Lin 林錫山

Thursday, 31 December 2020 06:35

Due to its unique international situation, Taiwan is often obliged to resort to all kinds of self-demeaning titles in its dealings with international entities or foreign countries, such as joining sports events as “Chinese Taipei” or calling its embassies “trade offices.”

Even with countries with whom it has diplomatic relations, Taiwan has to use the name “Republic of China” (ROC).

Taiwanese have long been subject to the ignominy of seeing their government have to accept these compromises. Given the rapidly changing international situation, Taiwan now has a rare opportunity to redress this injustice.

On Dec. 17, the Formosan Association for Public Affairs, which has for decades advocated in Washington for Taiwan’s interests, initiated a joint letter by 78 US lawmakers, presented to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, calling on the US government to change the name of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington to the “Taiwan Representative Office.”

During a question-and-answer session in the Legislative Yuan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Harry Tseng (蔡啟芳) confirmed that these events were unfolding. Taiwanese were elated when they heard the news.

If Taiwan is to gradually regain respect in the international community, one of the main factors is its reliance on the support of the US.

In the same vein, if the Taiwanese industry is to keep developing, be it semiconductors or traditional industries, it would also need the US market to keep growing.

This is something that not only international relations experts and the business community acknowledge: Taiwanese are keenly aware of it, too.

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The Formosa Republican Association (FRA) has consistently supported the government in strengthening its relations with the US.

In the name of the FRA, I call on the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to get fully behind this joint letter in support of Taiwan and not to leave it at the tepid acknowledgment that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued.

Naturally, the FRA understands why the ministry might have certain misgivings about throwing its full weight behind the initiative, but if it is inconvenient for the government to express a positive response to the goodwill shown by our US friends, then at least the DPP could do so in its capacity as a political party, or perhaps even through a non-governmental organization proxy.

At the same time as the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is attempting to put a spanner in the works of the allowing US pork imports, the FRA also brings attention to the fact that the KMT fully supported US pork and beef imports when it was in power.

It did so because it was all too aware that the US is Taiwan's lifeline. Historically speaking, the fact that the KMT regime in Taiwan was able to survive at all was largely due to the help it received from the US, not least the military shield it provided.

The KMT is the last party in Taiwan that should forget what the US has done for the nation and the last party to oppose the US. The KMT legislative caucus in October proposed a motion to address the frequent incursions into Taiwan's airspace by Chinese People's Liberation Army fighter jets, saying that the government should work to persuade the US to help Taiwan defend against China and work toward the resumption of formal diplomatic ties with Washington. These motions were passed with cross-party support in the legislature on Oct. 6.

During a lecture at the FRA, Akio Yaita, a writer at the Taipei bureau of Japanese daily Sankei Shimbun, questioned how it was that the KMT expects the US to send its military to help Taiwan resist the Chinese communists on one hand, but on the other accuses the US of trying to sell toxic pork products to Taiwan.

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As there is cross-party support for working to ask for US assistance in combating China and for resuming official US-Taiwan relations, the DPP and KMT should unite in welcoming the goodwill shown to Taiwan by its US friends.

The FRA believes that this would receive widespread approval in Taiwan, and any political party that unilaterally opposed this position would surely risk having the electorate retract its support.

Taiwanese want to see their nation engage with the rest of the world under its proper name, Taiwan.

This is the public will, and the two largest political parties in Taiwan should represent the electorate. They should not only acknowledge the goodwill of Taiwan's overseas allies, but also let the world know that Taiwanese want Taiwan to be called Taiwan, and no longer want their nation to be confused with the ROC.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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