

## An Open Letter to the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan

Written by Jack Healey  
Wednesday, 27 February 2013 10:00

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I hope this missive finds all of you well and healthy. This is the first time I have ever gone to a political party for help. I want to make it clear that I am coming to you from a space outside of party politics and am standing instead on the ground of human rights concerns for the former mayor of Taipei and the two-time President of Taiwan. But most of all, I ask you to support your former president. He needs your help now. He helped you. He helped Taiwan. He is a symbol of your nation and symbols do not die.

Taiwan's human rights achievements have been impressive, and the move towards real democracy and respect for pluralism have been considerable. Those milestones are at risk right now, with a sinking into the grimmest of party politics and a failure to defend principles of human rights and decency.

Mr. Chen Shui-bian has spent over four years in jail for corruption. Many human rights people inside and outside of Taiwan doubt the fairness of the trial. These accusation and convictions will be judged by history one way or another. But the time for Chen is running out faster than that. We sent two respected human rights researchers and advocates, Hans Wahl and Harreld Dinkins as part of an HRAC team to investigate the conditions of Chen's detention and their main finding was concern about Chen's health care (and lack) in prison to make conditions worse and permanent. The reports were not a ringing endorsement of prisoner rights in Taiwan nor the ability of Taiwan to transition from one party to another without sentiments of acrimony and revenge, two characteristics one doesn't associate with a stable and flourishing democracy.

Each of you in the DPP needs to look at your former leader and president and see how he is doing as a human being. Forget the flash visits to the hospital where tests were run like there was an emergency to move quickly. Forget the cell and its size or the question of his bedding. The fundamental premise is this: The health conditions of any person held by the state are the responsibility of the state. Just look at the result of this imprisonment and that conclusion can be seen by just getting into the room with Chen. His health issues were not dealt with properly in the prison system. The damage done by this neglect is permanent, physically and psychologically. This is a travesty of international norms. The medical well-being of inmates is the responsibility of the State, and in this case Taiwan has failed to live up to international standards and release is the only way to mitigate this responsibility.

Democracy demands justice, but also orderly transitions between parties and should foster compassion. That is why President Ford forgave President Richard Nixon and let him go home

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with a bit of dignity. The U.S. was served well by that decision. No jail time for Nixon who made a run against the U.S. Constitution. President Ford made a great decision for his nation. President Ma should do the same. Peru convicted Fujimori of murder, bodily harm, and kidnapping. In the meantime, it is Chen, never accused of violence against Taiwan, who is convicted and suffers permanent physical damage. This is not the behavior of a civilized government.

Any one who twice won a national election is an enduring symbol of Taiwan. The harm brought on by the prison system will not be forgotten by them. Symbols do not die; they fade, but are not forgotten. Your party supported him. Many of you were elected and probably inspired to go into politics by him. No figure has come along in the DPP to rival the political ability of this man and the lack of decisive action on a human rights basis calls the honor of the DPP itself into question with tepid and lackluster efforts.

Now it is your turn. Begin with a massive rally to call for President Ma to send Mr. Chen home. Do not seek party politics. Do not seek to challenge everything about the KMT. Seek to forge alliances across party lines, for this is how politics get more civil and this is how principles are protected. [Hau Lung-bin is an example](#) of this strategy. Seek the principles of human rights and peaceful governmental transitions. Lobby politicians from across the spectrum to get the Yuan and the President Ma's office to do what it takes to release this man. Agitate the global media to tell the story of disregarding a former head of state's medical demise as a result of his imprisonment. Organize human rights organizations to make the case for his freedom. Mr. Chen's legal and medical case needs a serious review and a call for compassion of a gravely ill man. A follow-up report may be useful.

Taiwan's advances to a democratic nation have been impressive. Both KMT and DPP must realize that if Chen dies in prison, there will be ruptures in the body politic. The nation will inter the spirit that has struggled for human rights improvements. The world will wonder why, with anger inside the nation and disbelief internationally. The DPP has a chance to prove itself worthy of the nation by getting Mr Chen home. Just do it.

Source: [Jack Healey's Blog at Huff Post](#)