

The Madness of Ma: Slow-Motion State Violence in Taiwan and the Murder of Chen Shui-bian

Written by Jack Healey
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The Human Rights Action Center has been involved for seven months in a investigation into the incarceration conditions and medical care of former Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian. We sent a longtime Asia researcher, Harreld Dinkins, and [Hans Wahl](#), a researcher with considerable expertise on prison standards and the imperatives for prisoner medical care to Taiwan last year. What we discovered was that, while the President's material conditions of incarceration were close enough to international standards that an argument might be dismissed, that his medical care had been systematically denied or inadequate such that there were conditions that emerged that were previously non-existent and conditions that were made considerably worse and permanent.

Indeed, consistent independent medical reporting suggests that Chen Shui-bian is likely to have a host of medical conditions that are permanent and will impact his quality of life and perhaps a considerably shorter lifespan.

With considerable attempts to work with all sides on this issue, we never made assertions about Chen's guilt nor innocence, for that should not impact an individual's human rights or basic rights. We had just gotten to a place of hope in fact. After a recent D.C. discussion with the savvy and charming former VP Annette Lu in D.C., we thought we were likely looking to a parole or pardon sometime soon. After all, Ma has no option to run for an additional term and an approval rating lingering near 11 percent. The good (and compassionate) money would seem to have been on trying to salvage something of the premise of "Thou Shalt Not Kill" that was an important part of Ma's Catholic upbringing. Such seems to no longer be a rule that Ma is leaning towards.

In a predawn transfer without any advance notice, Chen Shui-bian was recently transferred from a medical facility capable of dealing with and managing his multiple conditions and taken back to a prison with a rudimentary ability to deal with complex medical issues. This transfer was done after a ten-person panel of international human rights experts recently issued a report recommending that Chen be kept in a sufficient medical facility and/or sent home on medical parole or pardon. This transfer was done after our contacts on both the "Blue" (KMT) side of the ruling party and the "Green" (DPP) side of the opposition had begun to express optimism and even a willingness to forgive for the thought was that Chen would be allowed to live his life with adequate medical care and dignity.

Taiwan is at a strange crossroads. Ma Ying-jeou's government has been credibly accused of interfering with the judicial process and being motivated by revenge politics throughout this

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process. Still, in the past there have been moments of compassion shown to Chen during this period. No longer. Based on his medical conditions and the reports of our organization and credible human rights experts (and to be sure there have been some fringe characters on both sides of this debate as well), to transfer him back into a prison with merely a prison clinic at this point and to do so against the advice of the medical team that was caring for him, the Ma government has apparently chosen to take a former president convicted of nonviolent financial offenses and to kill him through systematic neglect. The outcome of this treatment to date has been exacerbated conditions and permanent disability.

What would a rational observer conclude from this other than the Ma government has decided to engage in a slow-motion form of murder?

We call on all peoples concerned about human rights and prisoner rights, around the world, to send an email to your governments (good), to call your representatives (better), or to write an actual physical letter (best) to ask for a redress of this concern. For Taiwan, which faces what might be called a "unique" diplomatic situation, the sensitivity to international politics and business pressure is considerable. Remember: it does not matter if you think that Chen Shui-bian is innocent or guilty. It matters that when the State incarcerates any prisoner, the State becomes responsible for that prisoner's well-being and health. The Taiwan government has acted shamefully in this regard. They are not adhering to international standards. They are not adhering to the legal/cultural traditions of their own history (unless they're trying to emulate the [White Terror](#) or the [228 Incident](#) in microcosm). The opposition hasn't been that great at this either. With considerable party politics contributing to grandstanding to win current or future publicity and votes, there seems a loss to pay attention to the immediate and general focus of our concern: the rights of Chen Shui-bian and of other prisoners to receive adequate medical care and to have their dignity maintained.

Do not let Ma Ying-jeou murder Chen Shui-bian without speaking up against it. Do not let this happen without letting him know that the eyes of the world are on him and that he is behaving abominably. These are not the universal standards of justice or human rights being implemented in Taiwan. This is grudge and cowardice and abuse.

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