

Pingpu activist calls for new, separate ministry

Written by Taipei Times

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Impatient with the Council of Indigenous Peoples' (CIP) response to Pingpu Aborigines' demand for recognition, activist Lin Sheng-yi (林勝義), a Pingpu from the Ketagalan tribe, yesterday urged the government to create a separate ministry to handle Pingpu affairs.

"I don't know why is it so hard for the CIP to officially recognize the Pingpu as Aborigines," Lin told a news conference in Taipei. "The Pingpu have been considered indigenous peoples by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues since 1994 and we've always been active in Aboriginal movements — why is it so hard to recognize us as Aborigines?"

"The council is controlled by Aborigines living in the mountains. We demand that the government create a separate agency for the Pingpu," he said.

Pingpu (平埔) — or "flat lands" — is a term widely used to describe Aborigines who once inhabited most of lowland areas around the country.

The Ketagalan were the first inhabitants of northern Taiwan, with their historical tribal area stretching from Taoyuan County to the Greater Taipei area and parts of Yilan County.

With the arrival of Han immigrants from China, most of the Pingpu were either driven off their own lands or they gradually assimilated into the immigrant communities.

Like other Aborigines, many Pingpu were officially recognized as Aborigines until the 1950s, but they then lost their status because of a failure to register their ethnic status with the government.

In recent decades, many Pingpu have been active in participating in the Aboriginal rights movement, as well as in the campaign to restore official recognition of their ethnic status.

The council has been reluctant to give an immediate, positive response to the Pingpu campaign. However, earlier this year, Council of Indigenous Peoples Minister Sun Ta-chuan (孫大川) resurrected a Pingpu commission within the council — which was first started by the Democratic Progressive Party, but allowed to expire by former council chief Chang Jen-hsiang (張金堂) — to work on resolving the issue.

Lin is equally unhappy with the Pingpu commission.

"What good could a commission with an annual budget of only NT\$1 million[US\$31,400] do? What could the 12 Pingpu commission members really do within a council that does not recognize the Pingpu?" Lin asked.

Lin's call for a separate Pingpu affairs agency did not win support from most other Pingpu activists.

"We're not happy with the council's slow responses to our demands, but we're Aborigines, so

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of course our business is the council's business," Kahavu Cultural Association executive director Aylian Hsiao (阿立山) told the *Taipei Times* by telephone. "I would not oppose having a separate agency for Pingpu, but it definitely is not my first choice."

The Kahavu are a Pingpu Aboriginal tribe living in Nantou County's Puli Township (埔里).

Head of Tainan County Alliance of Siraya Communities, Tuan Hung-kun (團洪坤), who is also the deputy convener of the council's Pingpu commission, said he would never have asked for a separate Pingpu agency.

"The Pingpu are Aborigines, we should always stand with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters," he said. "We're fighting for our ethnic identity, not for a cultural identity."

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