

## Group urges return of ‘detained’ letters

Written by Taipei Times

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The Taiwan Association for Truth and Reconciliation yesterday called on the government to return letters written by political prisoners before their execution to their families.

“We hereby ask President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) to hand these private letters ‘detained’ by the state for decades to relatives [of the executed prisoners] and apologize to them on behalf of the state,” association chairman Chen Chun-hung (陳春聲) told a news conference in Taipei.

“We would also like to ask the National Archives Administration [NAA] to create a set of standard operations procedures to handle the delivery of such letters and to take the initiative to find all such letters in its collections of documents,” Chen said.

Though the actual number of political prisoners executed during the White Terror — the period from 1949 to 1987 when martial law was imposed on the country — is still not known, an accepted estimate is more than 3,000 people. While many of the prisoners had written letters to their loved ones before they were executed, most such letters remain in government archives.

Family members of Huang Wen-kung (黃文雄), who was executed in 1952 for alleged involvement in communist activities, did not know that Huang had left words for them until 2007 when his granddaughter, Chang Yi-lung (張宜龍), learned about her grandfather’s execution from an exhibition on the Martial Law Era and obtained copies of five letters Huang wrote addressing each member of the family.

Although Huang’s two children were fortunate enough to learn about their father’s love to them despite the decades-long delay, Huang’s wife was suffering from dementia at the time the letters were discovered and passed away not long after.

“These letters could be time sensitive and the government should hand them to families of executed political prisoners as soon as possible so that they can read them in time,” Huang’s daughter, Huang Chun-lan (黃春蘭), said at the press conference.

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Although the Huangs were finally able to read Huang Wen-kung's letters, the NAA only agreed to give them replicas, not original copies.

“We asked for the original copies, but the NAA only told us not to worry because the original copies were well kept,” Huang Chun-lan said. “But original copies bear a different meaning — maybe we might decide to give them to a museum in the end, but it's our call.”

Huang Wen-kung's son, Timothy Huang (黃子明), said the way the government handles the issue shows the lack of sincerity it has toward bringing about reconciliation.

“I wrote to the president last year and the Presidential Office replied that they have handed the issue to the Executive Yuan. It's been over a year and I haven't heard back,” he said. “We're not the only family with the wish; the government should show its sincerity in bringing about true reconciliation.”

Source: [Taipei Times - 2011/02/19](#)