

Church lambasts Ma over treatment of Chen Shui-bian

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The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan yesterday lambasted President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration for its treatment of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), while calling for medical parole for Chen.

In a press conference yesterday, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan General Assembly moderator Pusin Tali (蕭慎終) said that Chen, serving an 18-and-a-half-year prison term on corruption charges, has been imprisoned for 1,000-odd days at Taipei Prison, where he shares a 1.3 ping (4.29m²) cell with another inmate and is under 24-hour surveillance.

Treating any criminal like this is maniacal, no matter whether regarding it in terms of human rights or from the perspective of the judiciary, he said.

"The government is treating A-bian [Chen's nickname] like a prisoner of war," Tali said, adding that the Ma administration was not respecting Chen's human rights.

Tali also questioned the sudden change of judges presiding over Chen's case, saying that it did not correspond to judicial propriety. He also alleged that the move was politically motivated.

Tali was referring to an event in 2009, when the Taipei District Court made a decision to "combine cases" and turned over the Second Financial Reform case in which Chen was implicated — then presided over by Taipei District Court Judge Chou Chan-chun (周建勳) — to Judge Tsai Shou-shun (蔡守訓), who presided over the special secretaries case against the former president.

Tsai revoked Chou's previous decision to release Chen without bail.

Reverend Lyim Hong-tiong (林宏通) added that even former president Chiang Kai-shek (蔣經國) had not treated his enemies in such a harsh manner. He referred to the late general Chang Hsue-liang (常陸良), saying that Chiang had only limited Chang's movements to his house in Taichung and had not imprisoned him.

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Lin said that the Ma administration should entertain the option of detaining Chen at his house, instead of in a prison.

“We do not wish to see Ma become more authoritarian and hope that he will listen to public opinion,” Lin said.

He added that if Ma respected life, he should allow Chen Shui-bian to be released on medical parole.

Meanwhile, the former president yesterday took leave of absence from the High Court hearing of his state affairs fund case, with his lawyer citing that A-bian was unable to narrate events in his own words.

To demonstrate that Chen Shui-bian’s stuttering would affect his ability to coherently defend himself, his lawyer imitated how A-bian had spoken to him about the court hearing.

The lawyer asked the court to cease hearing the case on the grounds that his client should not be over-stimulated, citing Article 294 of the Criminal Procedural Act (刑事訴訟法), which states that if a defendant is unable to be present at court because of illness, the court should suspend hearing the matter until the defendant can appear in court.

In response, the collegiate bench presiding over the case said that the opinions of medical experts should be taken into consideration in deciding whether to halt the hearings or not. It added that it has already sent a letter to the Taipei Veterans General Hospital asking Chens doctor to report on his health.

The doctor’s response would form the prime basis for a decision on whether to halt all hearings of the case, the court said, adding that it is willing to cancel a hearing scheduled for March 19.

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