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Amnesty International Secretary-General Salil Shetty speaks in an interview in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Chien Jung-fong, Taipei Times

Taiwan has made significant progress in the past 30 years in terms of human rights protection, Amnesty International (AI) secretary-general Salil Shetty said yesterday.

However, he said there is still room for improvement — especially when it comes to police brutality and the use of torture against peaceful demonstrators.

On his first visit to Taiwan, Shetty said it does not feel like an unfamiliar country, because AI, along with other global human rights organizations, have worked with Taiwan before, including efforts to rescue political prisoners during the Martial Law era.

After several days in the country, which has included traveling down to Greater Kaohsiung, Shetty said he has enjoyed Taiwan's landscape and people's dynamism and energy,

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especially when it comes to human rights issues.

"I believe events in the past two or three months, such as the Sunflower movement, have been helpful in raising public awareness and increasing involvement in human rights campaigns," Shetty said in an interview with the Taipei Times yesterday.

However, when it comes to how the government responded to those demonstrations, Shetty shakes his head.

"We haven't made detailed research, but from all the assessments we've made so far, there have been several cases in which the police have used excessive force in crowd control, especially when facing peaceful, sitting demonstrators," he said. "In a democratic society, peaceful assembly is a fundamental right of the people — it is also stated in the Taiwanese Constitution — and it is the government's responsibility to protect it."

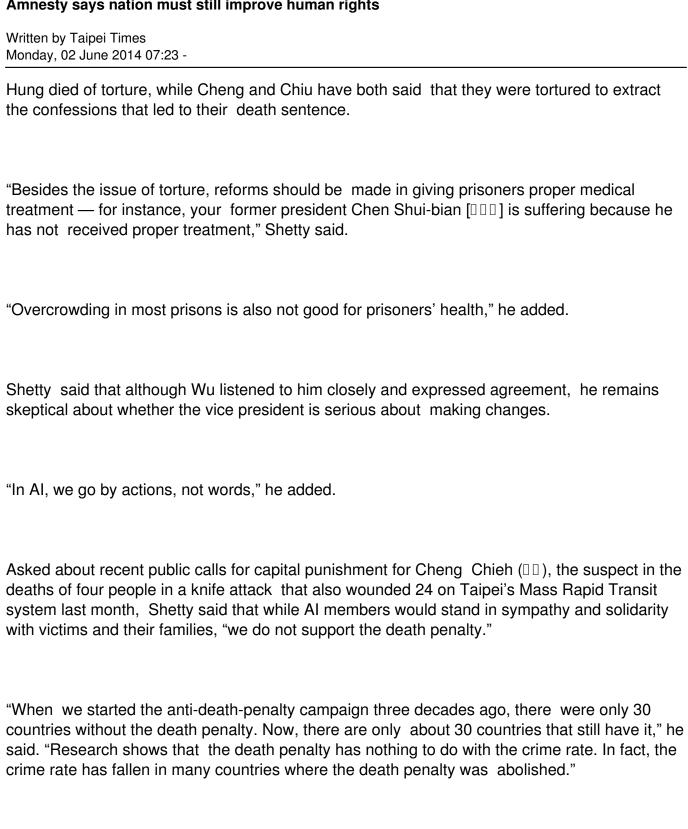
"The use of public spaces for public protests is a legitimate use, as long as it's for peaceful demonstration," he added.

Shetty said that, for instance, the use of water cannons against peaceful demonstrators is in violation of international human rights standards. "There is a set of UN guidelines for police handling of public protests, which especially stresses the point that all measures must be 'necessary' and 'proportional,'" he said.

Shetty said he brought up the issue in a meeting with Vice President Wu Den-yih ([][][]) on Friday and called on the government to take immediate action on allegations and complaints of excessive use of force by the police, as well as provide better training for police crowd control and revise the Assembly and Parade Act ([[][][][]]), which falls outside of international standards.

Speaking about the death of late army corporal Hung Chung-chiu ($\square\square\square$) and the cases of death-row inmates Cheng Hsing-tse ($\square\square\square$) and Chiu Ho-shun ($\square\square\square$), Shetty said the three cases show that — long after Martial Law was lifted in 1987 — torture still exists in the nation, since

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"The question to ask is why the government is unable to prevent the crime in the first place," he

Shetty also urged Taiwanese to show more concern about human rights violations in China.

added.

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"Taiwan has geographical proximity to China, which has grown economically, but does not respect human rights," he said. "Taiwan shows the contrast: You have economic growth with human rights protection."

"However, if you want to sustain economic growth and social stability, you need to have more freedom," Shetty said.

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