

Activist calls on US voters to appeal for Chen's release

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A Washington human rights organization is urging Americans to protest the continued imprisonment of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), whose medical condition is deteriorating.

In a column carried this week by the Huffington Post Web site, Human Rights Action Center founder Jack Healey called on voters to contact their US representatives and senators to press for the release of Chen, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for corruption, on health grounds.

“Remind them of the previously impressive track record of Taiwan moving to respect human rights and to become a modern multiparty democracy and tell them that you’re concerned about their treatment of Chen Shui-bian and the signal it sends to all opposition politicians in Taiwan and elsewhere in the region who think of challenging single party rule,” Healey wrote.

“It would be far better to send Chen home before his seventh anniversary of being in prison rather than have him end up expiring in one,” he wrote.

Healey said that Chen should be released on medical parole, a compassionate pardon or a graduated release program, and that it should happen as quickly as is feasible “for the sake of the future of a Taiwan where democracy and human rights both flourish in full bloom rather than flicker in darkness.”

Healey said there is strong evidence of “political direction” in the way that prosecutors prioritized and pursued fraud charges against Chen.

He also claims there were “enough deviations from accepted standards of fair judicial proceedings” to call into question the independence of the judiciary in Chen’s case.

“It currently appears that the continued incarceration of Chen is an attempt to punish the audacity of the opposition to actually challenge the KMT [Chinese Nationalist Party] as the

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source of power on the island and a cautionary warning to all others about the hazards of demanding a voice in the question of how to govern," Healey said.

He said that the speed with which the Sunflower movement rose and took root in the public imagination suggests another "seismic shift" in the nation's hearts and minds.

Healey made an appeal to President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) to free Chen before he dies in prison and to work to heal political polarization.

"Taiwan used to be one of the most inspiring places in Asia for human rights, and we hope that it can be so in the future," Healey said.

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