

Constitutional reform deadline issued

Written by Taipei Times

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A coalition of civic groups and human rights organizations yesterday demanded leaders of the nation's political parties to follow through on their promises to pursue constitutional reforms.

Despite diverse proposals for constitutional reforms from across party lines, action on the issue has been "limited to verbal expressions," the groups said.

The groups urged legislators to motion for a constitutional amendment by the end of the current legislative session — which closes on May 31 — to allow a referendum to take place concurrently with the presidential and legislative elections next year.

By law, amendments to the Constitution must be approved by the public through a referendum — which requires prior announcement by six months.

Given that the next legislative session is to take place from September to December, the current session might be the last opportunity for legislators to hold meaningful discussions on the reforms, National Taiwan University professor of law Chen Chao-ju (陳昭菊) said.

Taiwan Association for Human Rights vice president Chiou Wen-tsong (邱文宗) said that ideas on reforms to the Constitution have been brewing since the Sunflower movement last year, in which scores of protesters expressed their dissatisfaction toward the government's handling of a cross-strait service trade agreement.

"We have a president that lunges ahead, but we lack a healthy legislature to provide checks and balances [to his power]," Chiou said.

At a joint news conference in Taipei yesterday, representatives from the groups — including the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Taiwan Democracy Watch, the Awakening Foundation and the Judicial Reform Foundation — accused leaders of both the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of wavering on their stance toward constitutional reform.

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During a conference last week, the DPP reached a “preliminary consensus” to lower the voting age to 18, as well as to abolish the Control Yuan and Examination Yuan.

However, it also declared that a parliamentary system or presidential system were both “unfit for Taiwan’s political culture.”

Taiwan Democracy Watch member Yen Chueh-an (顏清安) said that the DPP’s failure to make a comprehensive proposal seemed to stand in stark contrast with DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) repeated calls for parliamentary reforms last year.

The groups accused KMT Chairman and New Taipei City Mayor Eric Chu (朱立倫) of inaction, saying that he has failed to contribute further to the discussion after brief suggestions of a parliamentary system.

Meanwhile, the Civic Alliance to Promote Constitutional Reform — a group calling for increased grassroots involvement in constitutional reform through a series of public forums — lauded former president Lee Teng-hui’s (李登輝) comments in a speech on Monday, adding that the former president’s views coincided with their own.

Lee said that upcoming reforms should be carried out through a two-stage process, in which certain procedural amendments — such as lowering the threshold for referendums — can be carried out first, while more divisive issues on government structure can be dealt with during a second stage.

He also emphasized the importance of the public involvement in the reforms, urging political parties to allow the public to express their opinions.

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