

Protesters rally in support of ‘Sunflower 119’

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Protesters demonstrate in front of the Executive Yuan in Taipei yesterday against the decision to indict 119 individuals in connection with the Sunflower movement protests in March last year.

Photo: Liao Chen-huei, Taipei Times.

Members of dozens of civic groups and about a dozen of the 119 people this week indicted for their activities during the Sunflower movement protests yesterday demonstrated outside the Executive Yuan against the prosecutors' decision.

The protesters criticized the government over “abuse of prosecution power” slamming what they said is its failure to hold the police accountable for the violence of officers during the Sunflower protests in March and April last year.

They accused President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration of launching a political purge and said the judicial system was acting as the government's hatchet man.

One of the 119, Huang Yu-fen (黃瑜芬), said the accused are not afraid to shoulder legal responsibilities arising from their occupation of the legislative main chamber, as the action was a legitimate response for citizens to a dysfunctional political system.

“However, as about 80 percent of the 119 indicted are being prosecuted for breaking into the Executive Yuan, why is it that police officers, who clearly used excessive force [on the night of the Executive Yuan compound sit-in] against peaceful demonstrators have not been prosecuted?” she said.

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The charges filed against protesters include “instigating others to commit crime” and called some “the masterminds,” — two terms Restoration of Taiwan Social Justice chief executive Lin Yu-lun (林育倫) said better describe Ma, “as he is the mastermind who instigated our protests and activities.”

He held up enlarged photographs clearly showing the face of a police officer as he wielded a baton.

“The photos have been shown by media outlets for months, but still the officer cannot be found,” he said.

The groups said the violence was reminiscent of the White Terror era, as nothing is known about the perpetrators, only about the victims of state violence.

Amnesty International Taiwan director Bo Tedards said that Amnesty does not generally get involved in domestic political affairs, “but it should be a basic human right for people to say yes or no.”

He called on the government not to ignore human rights, and said that the protesters should not be criminally indicted.

“Just as we [Amnesty International] maintain a neutral and fair stance, we hope this country’s judicial system does the same, but it is regrettable that the Taipei district prosecutors’ office has one-sidedly indicted the protesters but prosecuted none on the police side for the 324 [March 24] violence,” Tedards said.

Another of the activists charged, Wang Yi-kai (王宜凱), slammed Executive Yuan spokesperson Sun Lih-chyun (孫立群) comments about pleading “tolerance” by young protesters.

“‘Tolerance’ is not a word that should be used by perpetrators, but by their victims,” he said.

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Calling the prosecution “judicial hunt and murder,” Wang said the protesters have been discriminated against in their work and academic lives.

A photograph of the Sunflower movement was included and the protests were mentioned in last year’s UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu E-ling (邱毅) said.

“The report said that the current period is marked by a ‘democratic recession,’ in which governments are growing more repressive and ‘space to exercise the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association is shrinking,’” Chiu said. “The Executive Yuan has called the protesters ‘the shame of democracy,’ but I think it deserves the description more.”

Wellington Koo (吳俊雄), one of the lawyers volunteering to represent the indicted people said the movement was an “act done to uphold social justice” rather than a “crime” and that the volunteer lawyers would continue to help the protesters prove this in court.

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