

Student leader receives global youth award

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Global Youth of the Year Award recipient Liao Chung-lun sits in the auditorium of National Changhua Senior High School, where the awards ceremony was being held.

Photo: Chang Tsung-chiu, Taipei Times

National Changhua Senior High School yesterday held its first-ever Global Youth of the Year Awards, with Liao Chung-lun (廖仲倫), a leading figure in the student protests against the curriculum guideline changes, one of the five recipients.

The awards were founded to recognize young activists who have made significant contributions to promoting social justice and the rights of young people and children. They are funded by National Changhua Senior High School Library and the school's International Youth Leadership Conference.

In addition to Liao, the other awardees are Mazoun Almellehan from Syria, Khalidi Mngulu from Tanzania, Memory Banda from Malawi and Adda Smaradottir from Iceland.

Mazoun was absent at the ceremony because she lost her passport and could not get a replacement in time. A resident of a refugee camp in Jordan, Mazoun has fought to bring education to girls in Jordan's refugee camps and has been called the "Malala of Syria" by CNN.

Liao, a student from National Taichung First Senior High School and member of the student club Apple Tree Commune, was a leading organizer of the youth protest against the Ministry of Education's controversial changes to curriculum guidelines that critics said are China-centric and distorts history.

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The protesters broke into the ministry's compound and briefly occupied it on July 23 before they were arrested. The ministry later dropped charges against protesters aged under 18, though some again received court summons last month.

"There are many social injustices that must be fought now, or they will become impossible to fight in the future," Liao said in his acceptance speech, adding that the award helped convince him that "holding on to my convictions was the right thing to do."

Khalidi is a 17-year-old albino activist from Tanzania advocating the abolition of the widespread African practice of attacking albino children for their limbs, because it is believed that their body parts are fetishes that could bring good luck and wealth. Khalidi was invited by the World Health Assembly to speak in Geneva in May about his experiences.

Banda, 18, fought to end child marriage in Malawi, with the National Assembly earlier this year passing a law raising the legal age for marriage to 18.

Smaradottir is a feminist and a leader of Iceland's Free the Nipple campaign promoting gender equality, a cause that has garnered support from several Icelandic lawmakers and international celebrities, such as Madonna.

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