

NGO takes credit for Lee Ching-yu trip

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Lee Ching-yu, wife of human rights advocate Lee Ming-che, attends a news conference in Taipei on Tuesday after her visit to the US to seek help in freeing her husband, who is detained in China.

Photo: Huang Yao-cheng, Taipei Times

Lee Ching-yu's (李靜如) trip to the US last week to seek help in freeing her husband, human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), was arranged by US non-governmental organization (NGO) China Aid, a statement released yesterday by a task force involved with the rescue efforts said.

Lee Ming-che was detained after entering Zhuhai, China, from Macau on March 19. He used to work for the Democratic Progressive Party and is a staff member at Wenshan Community College in Taipei, as well as a volunteer at the NGO Covenant Watch.

Lee Ching-yu on Thursday last week testified at a US House of Representatives committee hearing about her husband's detention.

Chinese-language *Next Magazine* this week reported that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) sent

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aids to help arrange Lee Ching-yu's US visit.

The report also said Tsai's aids criticized Lee Ching-yu for "drawing too much attention" during her trip, affecting China's willingness to release Lee Ming-che ahead of the Dragon Boat Festival on Tuesday.

China Aid president Bob Fu (傅博) on Wednesday rebuffed the magazine's report.

In a separate statement issued yesterday, the task force involved with the rescue efforts said Lee Ching-yu's US trip had nothing to do the Presidential Office or the government.

The government treated the issue with apathy, and the Mainland Affairs Council had ignored Lee Ching-yu's letters, it said.

It also said that during the council's first meeting with civic groups involved with the case on April 20, council Deputy Minister Chiu Chui-cheng (邱垂成) asked Lee Ming-che's family members to "lay low" if they wanted China to release him.

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy president Hsu Szu-chien (許世昌) was assigned by the Presidential Office to work out solutions with the task force, but in effect was making their pursuit of international aid more difficult, the statement said, adding that as a result, Lee Ming-che's family declined governmental subsidies and took matters into their own hands to defend their freedom of action and expression.

After Lee Ching-yu returned to Taiwan, no governmental agency sent officials to learn about the details, the statement said.

The information the task force heard from the Presidential Office as reported by *Next Magazine* were "distorted remarks that were a far cry from the truth," it added.

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“Compared with the support and goodwill the White House had shown us, the Tsai administration was cold-hearted and indifferent toward the victim,” it said.

The trip was single-handedly organized by Fu with the help of China Aid, as Lee Ching-yu could not have arranged it by herself, it said.

The statement also called on Beijing to immediately release Lee Ming-che, “whose humanitarian work is noble and respected,” in addition to urging the Tsai administration to stop fabricating lies.

“We understand that, given the circumstances across the Taiwan Strait, there is little the government can do to rescue Lee Ming-che. We can also live with the government’s insincerity when it sent a negotiator to resolve the issue,” it said. “However, the government should avoid turning itself into a laughingstock by making remarks that are far from the truth.”

The Presidential Office yesterday said that “Lee Ming-che is our citizen,” and that its responsibility is prioritizing his safety while upholding the nation’s dignity.

The government has made continuous efforts to rescue Lee Ming-che and hopes that he can return soon, it said, adding that it has remained in contact with his family to provide them with a thorough understanding the rescue efforts.

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