

Taiwan condemns WHA's media ban

Written by Taipei Times

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Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Lin Ching-yi wears Taiwan badges yesterday while listening in on this year's meeting of the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

Photo: CNA

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a stern protest over the WHO's decision to deny Taiwanese news outlets access to the World Health Assembly (WHA), the annual meeting of its decisionmaking body that opened yesterday in Geneva, Switzerland, calling on the WHO to respect press freedom.

The ministry issued a statement protesting and condemning the UN body's decision not to grant media accreditation to journalists from Taiwan.

It also called on WHO member countries and international media to demand that the WHO respect and protect press freedom, adding that the organization is serving China's political objectives by depriving Taiwanese journalists of their right to cover news.

It is the second year in a row that Taiwan has failed to obtain an invitation to the WHA due to China's obstruction, the ministry said.

Due to Taiwan's exclusion from the global health network, Taiwan was unable to acquire timely disease information during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, which cost dozens of lives, the ministry said.

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The WHO, as the world's leading health organization, should safeguard the right to health of all human beings, including by providing access to health information, the ministry said, adding that the WHO's refusal to accredit Taiwanese reporters amounts to a serious violation of the universal human rights enshrined in the UN Charter.

The ministry said it would continue to solicit support from Taiwan's diplomatic allies and countries friendly to Taiwan, asking them to lodge protests with the WHO and demand that it not cave in to political pressure from China.

Last week, US non-governmental organization Freedom House also weighed in on the issue of accreditation refusal.

Arch Puddington, a fellow at the organization, said the WHO's decision was "the latest in a series of capitulations by international agencies and private businesses to China's censorship requirements."

International Federation of Journalists president Philippe Leruth on Tuesday last week said that the decision was "unacceptable."

He said he would write to the institutions responsible for the decision and urge them to honor the right of international media to cover the annual event.

Taiwan started seeking an invitation to the WHA in 1997 and was finally invited as an observer in 2009 when Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) was president.

The nation was able to attend the WHA every year from 2009 to 2016, but since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took office in May 2016, Beijing has blocked the WHA from extending an invitation to Taiwan last year and this year.

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