

Nation protests WHO denigration: Wu

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A child receives a vaccination shot at a hospital in Huaibei in China's Anhui Province on July 26 last year.

Photo: AFP

Taiwan did not participate in a WHO-organized vaccines conference in Beijing on Feb. 21 to protest the global body's denigration of the country, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) said yesterday.

The WHO again left the issue of Taiwan's participation to be handled by Beijing, which did not send an invitation until 1am on Feb. 21, the same day it was held in Beijing, Wu said at a meeting of the Legislative Yuan's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee.

Despite insisting that no one should be left behind when it comes to healthcare, the WHO always excludes Taiwan, Wu said, adding that he hoped the organization could engage in greater introspection and overcome its discriminatory treatment of the nation.

He made the statements in response to Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Mary Chen's (陳玉珍) question on why going to the conference would have been a problem and why the ministry could not provide airline tickets for a delegation to attend it.

Wu said it was a matter of principle, and that the ministry could not accept requiring Beijing's approval to attend WHO events.

He also said it would be inappropriate for Taiwan to accept a last-minute invitation, which

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could give the impression that the government consents to its downgrading.

DPP Legislator Lin Jing-yi (林景宜) asked Wu if the current situation stemmed from a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that China allegedly signed in secret with the WHO in 2005.

Wu said that was the case and that Taiwan had lodged protests over the MOU.

“You can’t just go and sign an MOU with one country, and impose rules on another country,” Wu said.

Asked whether the government had sought the help of other countries to complain about Taiwan’s late receipt of an invitation to the conference, Wu said doing so would not be helpful.

“There are many Chinese and WHO officials [at the conference] who would simply say: ‘OK fine, don’t attend then.’ Our best option is still to go straight to the WHO about it,” he said.

Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) yesterday also criticized the WHO’s treatment of Taiwan, saying its obstruction of the nation’s participation was harmful to global efforts to protect against epidemics.

Taiwan has already been impacted by the WHO’s treatment, he said, citing problems with flu vaccines received by the nation last year.

China’s issuance of an invitation on the same day of the conference was clearly done to prevent the nation’s participation, he said, adding that the members of Taiwan’s delegation listed in its application were all qualified.

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Taiwan was still able to get the information brought up in the conference through various channels, but its inability to attend cost it the opportunity for important face-to-face communication with and sharing of experience with international colleagues, he said.

Separately yesterday, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said that the delegation's inability to attend the conference was a "serious violation of the healthcare rights of Taiwanese."

Taiwan's exclusion also created a "hole in the world's immunization network" that would harm worldwide efforts to prevent epidemics, she said.

Epidemic-prevention efforts should not be bound by national borders, and should be free of impact from any particular nation's political views, she said.

Despite Chinese obstruction, Taiwan, as a responsible member of the international community, would continue to seek participation in global organizations and activities, fight for the healthcare rights of Taiwanese and contribute to international healthcare efforts, she said.

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