

FIDH congress opens in Taipei

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President Tsai Ing-wen delivers a speech yesterday at the opening ceremony of the 40th International Federation for Human Rights congress in Taipei.

Photo: Tu Chien-jung, Taipei Times

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) yesterday opened its 40th congress in Taipei, the first time the event has been held in Asia.

More than 400 rights advocates, government officials and experts from 184 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 112 countries are attending the five-day congress, said the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, which is cohosting the event.

Taiwan was chosen to host this year's congress, which is held every three years, because it is a vibrant democracy, which "stands in stark counterpoint to many of its regional neighbors," the federation said.

In a speech at the opening ceremony, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said the government is committed to improving human rights protection in a wide range of areas.

Her administration has introduced measures to eliminate workplace discrimination against women, promoted judicial reforms and pushed legislation to make Taiwan the first Asian nation to legalize same-sex marriage, she said.

"I have to tell you it was not an easy process to go through, but we finally made it," she said.

The road to human rights is a long one, but together with NGOs, the government would continue to work toward building “a fairer and more just” Taiwan, she said.

The congress will hopefully provide an opportunity for Taiwan to learn from other nations’ experiences and share its own, Tsai added.

Under this year’s theme of “Our Right, Our Fight, Our Future — Reclaiming the Universality of Human Rights,” congress delegates hope to explore questions such as how to ensure equal rights for minorities and in cross-border situations, association president Clarence Chou (周清) said.

The sharing of experience between advocates and experts from different parts of the world is essential in the fight to improve human rights, he said.

The ceremony also featured an open plea from former death row inmate Hsu Tzu-chiang (許正昌) for Chiou Ho-shun (邱和順), who remains on death row, and whom Hsu said was wrongfully convicted of murder as he had been.

Hsu, who was convicted of the 1995 kidnap and murder of businessman Huang Chun-shu (黃春樹), was imprisoned for 16 years, spending most of the time on death row, before he was released in 2012.

It took another four years to clear his name, as it was not until October 2016 that the Supreme Court ruled that he was not guilty, rejecting prosecutors’ appeals.

Hsu’s was one of the nation’s highest-profile human rights cases at the time.

Chiou was sentenced to death for the 1987 kidnap and slaying of nine-year-old Lu Cheng (盧政).

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The Supreme Court in July 2011 reaffirmed his death sentence.

His case is controversial because of the lack of forensic evidence, and allegations that his confession was obtained under torture.

“I do not have big dreams. I only hope that there will not be another Hsu Tzu-chiang,” Hsu said, expressing the hope that the federation would help Chiou as it helped him.

The congress features a two-day forum, which began yesterday, followed by internal meetings on the organization’s governance and a board election, the federation said.

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