

US House committee blasts ICAO over Taiwan issue

Written by Taipei Times

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A man cycles past the International Civil Aviation Organization headquarters building in Montreal, Canada, on June 15, 2017.

Photo: Reuters

The US House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs on Monday denounced the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for blocking Twitter accounts that criticized the organization's continued exclusion of Taiwan during a global public health crisis.

"The United Nation's @icao plays a valuable role in ensuring aviation security. But silencing voices that oppose ICAO's exclusion of Taiwan goes against their stated principles of fairness, inclusion, and transparency," the committee said in a Twitter post.

The tweet was a response to ICAO blocking critics, US news Web site Axios said in a report earlier on the same day.

According to Axios, Jessica Drun (戴琪), a non-resident fellow at the Project 2049 Institute, on Sunday noticed that ICAO had blocked her on Twitter, two days after she criticized the organization and the WHO for refusing to share knowledge with Taiwan's authorities in a tweet.

"This means civil aviation authorities for one of busiest regional airports do not receive up-to-date info on any potential ICAO-WHO efforts. This is how a virus spreads," Drun tweeted on Thursday last week.

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There has been an outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which causes respiratory infection, in the city of Wuhan, China, where the virus was first detected last month.

The virus has since spread to other countries, reaching Europe and the US as a result of people traveling by air, sea and land, or direct contact with a carrier.

The airport Drun mentioned in her tweet was Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, which was ranked the 11th busiest airport in the world in terms of international passenger traffic in 2018, handling more than 46.5 million passengers.

The Twitter accounts of several other critics were also blocked by ICAO, the Axios report said. However, it did not identify them, saying only that some were Capitol Hill staffers, analysts and an English teacher in Guangzhou who had posted similar criticisms.

Through his press shop Twitter account, US Senator Marco Rubio described ICAO's action as "outrageous" and said it was "another sign that the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to pressure and bully international organizations to bend to its demands are working."

In another tweet posted on Friday last week, Rubio said that Beijing's efforts to block Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations such as the WHO have real effects on global responses to public health crises.

"We are especially reminded of this as the deadly coronavirus has reached Taiwan," he tweeted.

ICAO Secretary-General Fang Liu (方良), a former Chinese aviation official, issued a reminder of the organization's social media rules on Twitter, saying: "Irrelevant, compromising and offensive material will be removed and the publisher precluded."

"Join us in improving advocacy for sustainable aviation development through fact-based

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discourse,” she tweeted.

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