

China urged to free Lee Ming-che

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Members of the Rescue Lee Ming-che Team and others hold up ribbons at a news conference in Taipei yesterday calling on the public not to forget about Lee and urging the Chinese authorities to release him.

Photo: Liu Hsin-de, Taipei Times

Human rights groups and lawmakers yesterday demanded China immediately release imprisoned rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), as they marked the third anniversary of his detention in Guangdong Province.

Lee, a staff member at Wenshan Community College in Taipei, went missing on March 19, 2017, after entering Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, from Macau. On Nov. 28 that year, the Yueyang City Intermediate People's Court in Hunan Province sentenced him to five years in Chishan Prison for subversion of state power by using online discussion groups to disseminate information attacking the Chinese government and for supporting the families of Chinese dissidents.

Taiwan has not forgotten Lee, members of the Rescue Lee Ming-che Team told a news conference in Taipei, which included a display about "365 Letters Written to Lee Ming-che" exhibition of letters written by Taiwanese to Lee.

Exhibition curator Wu Ting-chen (吳庭辰) urged the public to write more letters to Lee and urged the Chinese government to release Lee.

Several lectures are to be given in Taiwan over the next two weeks to raise awareness of Lee's case and human rights, and the letters exhibition is to go on display, Wu said, adding: "The possibility of another Lee Ming-che is always there."

Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu Ee-ling (邱毅) said Lee has not been able to write letters or make telephone calls since his detention, in contravention of the Prison Law of the People's Republic of China and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

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Covenants Watch chief executive officer Huang Yi-bee (黃宜蓀) said her group issued a statement with the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, the International Federation for Human Rights, the Taiwan Association for Human Rights demanding China immediately release Lee and stop retaliating against human rights advocates through forced disappearances and arbitrary arrests.

Independent Legislator Freddy Lim (林錫山) said Lee did not have a fair trial, but given the COVID-19 pandemic, the hygiene and human rights conditions in Chinese prisons are cause for concern.

“Our core belief is that Lee is innocent and should be released. However, given the current circumstances, it is at the very least that his situation in prison should be transparent to his family,” Lim said.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Hung Shen-han (洪申豪) said Taiwanese efforts to support Lee would not stop until he is released and China’s change in its human rights policies.

DPP Legislator Fan Yun (范雲) said “everybody is Lee Ming-che” if they supported the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong last year or have criticized Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) on the Internet.

After three years, it is time for Lee’s ordeal to end, Fan added.

New Power Party Legislator Chiu Hsien-chih (邱顯智) said Lee’s case was an obvious miscarriage of justice, and that he was concerned about Lee’s well-being, given that Chinese lawyers he worked with say conditions in Chinese prisons are “worrying.”

At a news conference at the Legislative Yuan on Wednesday, Lee’s wife, Lee Ching-yu (李靜瑜), pleaded with the Chinese government to allow her husband to call her.

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Her scheduled visit to the prison last month was canceled because of the COVID-19 outbreak and she has not received any information about her husband's condition since then, she said.

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