

China's UN entryism a threat

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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On April 4, Jiang Duan (江端), a minister at the Chinese mission in Geneva, Switzerland, was appointed to one of the five seats on the UN Human Rights Council Consultative Group.

Given the People's Republic of China's (PRC) atrocious record on human rights issues, the admission of one of its officials into a key UN group that monitors human rights situations around the world was widely lambasted.

Hillel Neuer, executive director of the Geneva-based non-governmental organization UN Watch, called Jiang's appointment "absurd and immoral."

Given that the group is tasked with evaluating candidates for UN posts that investigate human rights abuses, many observers, at the time, warned that China would abuse its position by appointing Beijing-friendly candidates into top posts.

It did not take long for Beijing to get to work. In an article published by Newsweek on Friday last week, Neuer reported that Jiang chaired the vetting process to nominate the next UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Out of 48 candidates, former Amnesty International secretary-general Irene Khan was put forward as the most qualified candidate. There is a reason Beijing favored Khan.

Amnesty International was founded in 1961 by British lawyer Peter Benenson to pressure governments around the world to release or at least give a fair trial to the "thousands of men and women [that] are being held in gaol without trial because their political or religious views differ from those of their governments." Benenson also coined the term "prisoners of conscience."

The organization has carried out sterling work championing the rights of the world's "forgotten prisoners," jailed for expressing their opinion.

During the Cold War, persecuted dissidents on both sides of the Iron Curtain received equal

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attention from the organization. This included Taiwanese political activist Pai Ya-tsan (白雲) who in 1975 was sentenced by a military court to life imprisonment for distributing campaign leaflets.

At the helm of Amnesty International between 2001 and 2009, Khan controversially expanded the organization's remit to include economic, social and cultural rights. In her book, *The Unheard Truth: Poverty and Human Rights*, released during her last year in office, Khan declared that poverty was a "human rights violation" and "the world's worst human rights crisis."

This was music to the ears to repressive regimes around the world, including the PRC, who could now hold up the human rights imperative of alleviating poverty as an excuse to repressing their citizens.

Beijing regularly uses poverty alleviation statistics to rebut criticism of its human rights violations. This pernicious false equivalence has become so prevalent that foreign politicians and commentators frequently and unthinkingly parrot the PRC's propaganda line, citing the "progress China has made in lifting its people out of poverty," giving the regime in Beijing a get-out-of-jail-free card on human rights.

In addition to a fawning speech at China's Tsinghua University in 2016, Khan has also lavished praise on China's Belt and Road Initiative, which according to Khan "has the potential to improve the lives of billions of people" and is "anchored in the purposes and principles of the United Nations." For Khan, it appears that the ends always justify the means.

We have been here before: There was no shortage of people in democratic nations willing to look the other way at the inhumane excesses of the Soviet Union, believing that the regime had stumbled upon a superior model of wealth distribution.

Like WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Khan will be malleable putty in the hands of the Chinese state.

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