

Internet users mock WHO for censorship

Written by Taipei Times

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WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus attends a session of the WHO Executive Board in Geneva, Switzerland, on Oct. 5.

Photo: REUTERS

Facebook users yesterday flooded the WHO's social media page with creative expressions of support after discovering that the page was blocking comments that mentioned Taiwan, days after representatives to the World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, Switzerland, were cut off for voicing support for the nation's participation.

Starting on Wednesday night, some users reported seeing an error message when attempting to post comments containing "Taiwan" or "Formosa" on a livestream of the 73rd WHA meeting, which began on Monday and is to conclude tomorrow.

Commenters got creative in their efforts to bypass the censor, using special characters, foreign scripts and creative formatting such as "T@!wan c@n help."

Local politicians also joined in with their own versions of the slogan.

Above a screenshot of his comment reading "T!a!i!w!a!n !C!a!n! H!e!!lp!" and "#Keelungcanhelp," Keelung Mayor Lin Yu-chang (林錫山) said that Taiwan has performed better than other countries during the pandemic and has even donated supplies, only to have its name disappear.

Facebook in a statement told Agence France-Presse that it "did not take any action against a livestream on the World Health Organization's Facebook Page earlier today (including restricting keywords or disabling comments)."

However, it also mentioned that page administrators have access to a range of moderation

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tools that include blocking certain words.

The nation has instructed its office in Geneva to lodge a complaint with the WHO and bitterly regrets the organization's conduct, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) told reporters at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei.

Support for Taiwan's participation in the WHA is growing, Wu said.

From Europe, the US and Latin America to Africa, more than 1,700 legislators have stood up for Taiwan, he said, adding that this is the international consensus.

The nation would continue to strive for greater support, Wu added.

Asked about the incident at a news briefing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐陽) said that the WHO's Facebook page is not only blocking comments about Taiwan, but also considers those containing "China," "Wuhan" and "[Chinese President] Xi Jinping" to be spam.

"By blocking messages of protest, the WHO has already deviated from its professionally neutral stance," she said. "Its censorship will certainly receive harsh international criticism, as will China's undue influence on the organization."

The WHO has repeatedly extorted the world to band together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, but has refused to invite Taiwan to participate in the WHA out of political considerations, Ou said.

This not only disregards the right to health of 23.5 million Taiwanese, but also flies in the face of the WHO's own charter, which ironically proclaims to strive for "health for all," she added.

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At the WHA on Tuesday, the chair of a session meeting interrupted representatives from Taiwanese allies Belize and the Kingdom of Eswatini after they praised the nation's pandemic efforts and called for its participation, saying that the item was not on the agenda.

The chair also ordered the session moderator to stop playing a prerecorded message from Palau after the representative decried Taiwan's exclusion, again citing its absence from the agenda.

As of yesterday, delegates of the US, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Haiti, Belize, Eswatini, Nicaragua, St Kitts and Nevis, Honduras, Nauru, Guatemala, Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands have voiced support for Taiwan's participation by speaking or submitting written statements at the assembly, the ministry said.

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