

Taipei councilors, Amnesty decry TRTC's 'censorship'

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Amnesty International Taiwan secretary-general Chiu E-ling, left, and other human rights advocates speak to reporters in Taipei yesterday, accusing Taipei Rapid Transit Corp of political censorship.

Photo: CNA

Human rights advocates and several Taipei city councilors yesterday accused Taipei Rapid Transit Corp (TRTC, 台北捷運) of political censorship, after it reportedly rejected an advertisement that mentioned “China” and “Lee Ming-che” (林明義).

Amnesty International Taiwan had planned to post a comic advertisement on Taipei’s MRT lines on Human Rights Day, Dec. 10, to increase public awareness about Lee, a human rights advocate who has been detained in China since 2017, association secretary-general Chiu E-ling (邱慈玲) said.

However, before it would approve its use, the company asked the association to remove “China” and Lee’s name from the advertisement, she said.

The company is a state-run enterprise that receives more than 70 percent of its funding from the Taipei City Government, but it rejected an advertisement by Amnesty International, Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Shih Yi-hsiang (施宜生) said.

The advertisement should be protected because Taiwan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which says: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his choice,” Shih said.

The company had approved Amnesty International’s “write for rights” advertisement, but not its “write to Lee Ming-che” advertisement, despite the two being similar campaigns, independent Taipei City Councilor Lin Liang-jyun (林良君) said.

This shows the widespread political censorship that the company exercises over advertisements, which has harmed freedom of expression and the advertising market, she said.

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) frequently says that Taipei is free and democratic, but his actions show the contrary, independent Taipei City Councilor Lin Ying-meng (林盈男) said, adding that Ko appears to be covering up for China, which is persecuting Lee.

Independent Taipei City Councilor Huang Yu-feng (黃宇峰) said that the company's advertisement standards are inconsistent.

On the one hand, it rejected the advertisement about Lee due to its politically motivated content, while on the other, it allowed advertisements that hype Ko's political performance, she said.

The company's internal advertisement review committee did not detail its reasons for turning down the "write to Lee Ming-che" advertisement, but kept asking Amnesty International Taiwan to revise the content due to a "controversial political issue," independent Taipei City Councilor Chiu Wei-chieh (邱偉杰) said.

TRTC said that the review committee has 13 members, 10 of whom are external members: some professionals — experts on advertising, culture, the arts, architecture, journalism, law, insurance and gender equality — and some from the Consumers' Foundation.

The company said that it bears the responsibility for not using advertisements that touch on politics, elections or controversial issues that lack a public consensus, as well as those that "offend good morals."

It said that it had conferred closely with Amnesty International Taiwan on the matter, and it agreed not to use the advertisement after evaluating its potential effects.

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