

Legislative Yuan Debate on Taiwan's Admission into the World Health Organization (WHO)

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the precariousness of Taiwan's limited formal international acceptance, which is due to Chinese diplomatic pressure. Beijing's displeasure over the Tsai administration's unwillingness to accept its formulation of the so-called "92 consensus" and, by extension, the "One Country, Two Systems" it seeks to impose on Taiwan, resulted in Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Assembly.¹ This meant that Taiwan's early warning about human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 did not receive the timely attention it deserved. An early decision by Taipei to halt travel from China also drew criticism from the PRC. In early April 2020, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus claimed that he received death threats and racist attacks originating from Taiwan and that the Taiwanese government did not disavow these comments. The Taiwanese government from President Tsai Ing-Wen down indicated that they oppose discrimination even as public calls in Taiwan for Ghebreyesus to provide evidence for his claims grew.

During the National Affairs Forum session in the Legislative Yuan on April 10, 2020, opposition legislator Chen I-Hsin (KMT; Non-Constituency, Overseas) called on Ghebreyesus to provide evidence for his claims. Chen also called for the DPP administration to use the international attention on Taiwan as a result of COVID-19 to go beyond the previous approach of asking WHO members with official diplomatic ties with Taiwan to raise the matter of Taiwan's membership in that body. He proposed that the administration pressure major powers like the United States and Japan, that have no official ties with Taiwan, to lead in pushing for Taiwan's WHO membership.

¹ The "92 Consensus" is a supposed understanding to agree to disagree that Taipei and Beijing reached in 1992 over the formulation of cross-strait relations. Beijing would see Taiwan as part of "one China" ruled under the PRC, consistent with its "one China principle." Taipei would concurrently view "one China" as allowing for "different interpretations" on different sides of the Taiwan Strait, allowing for the continued presence of the Republic of China on Taiwan. Then-National Security Advisor, Su Chi, admitted in a 2006 interview that he made up the concept to enable cross-strait ties to move forward, but did not face opposition. "One country, two systems" is the approach Beijing promised to adopt in ruling Taiwan—that both sides would be part of "one country," China, but Taiwan would be allowed to keep its capitalist system and be run by Taiwanese. This formula was applied to Hong Kong and Macau as demonstrations to Taiwanese. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2006/02/22/2003294106>

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Chair: May I invite Representative Chen I-Hsin to speak.

Rep. Chen I-Hsin: (9:18am) Chair, colleagues. In recent days, the WHO Secretary-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus criticized the way Taiwan treated him. Personal attacks—not only do fellow countrymen find this difficult to endure—I too find them regrettable. I would respectfully like to convey to Mr. Tedros, as the leader of an important international organization, your words need to be evidence-based. If you claim that the Taiwanese government is displaying racism towards you, you should bring up the evidence. If you can bring up the evidence, the persons who used discriminatory language should apologize; if you cannot bring evidence, could Mr. Tedros please apologize to the Taiwanese people.

I have to emphasize, placing all the responsibility on Mr. Tedros will lead to a loss of focus, which is not necessarily beneficial to Taiwan. The administration should make use of this opportunity when there is international attention on Taiwan to highlight the structural problems caused by the WHO excluding Taiwan. For instance, Taiwan had on December 31st last year already informed the WHO about human transmission of the novel lung infection. Yet, such important early warning information was overlooked because Taiwan is not a WHO member. Conversely, if Taiwan was already a WHO member, the successful pandemic control measures the administration put in place over these past three months could be made compatible with the WHO platform. This could allow more countries to see and learn. Perhaps the current global pandemic might not be so serious.

Today, I urge Mr. Tedros to please bring up the evidence used to accuse the Taiwan government. If you can bring it up, they should apologize; if you cannot bring it up, then please apologize. I also urge the administration to use this opportunity when the world is supporting Taiwan to change policies regarding our requests to the WHO. In the past, we asked countries with diplomatic ties to raise the issue with the WHO.

This time, consider asking countries without diplomatic relations to help raise Taiwan's case, especially big, important countries like the United States and Japan. Given the thanks and support the United States and Japan expressed toward Taiwan, if they can lead the initiative to invite Taiwan to

this year's WHA annual meeting and to join the WHO system in future, this could attract more countries to support Taiwan. I respectfully request the administration and Premier Su to consider this seriously, thank you.

National Affairs Forum

Time: April 10, 2020 (Friday) 0903hrs

Location: Legislative Yuan Chamber

Chair: Speaker Yu Hsi-kun

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