

Press Release

December 10th, 2019

2019 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award Ceremony

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy held the 2019 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award Ceremony at the Taipei Guest House today (12/10). At the ceremony, President Tsai Ing-wen presented the award plaque and TFD Chairman Su Jia-chyuan the grant to this year's laureate, the Diplomacy Training Program from Australia.

President Tsai said in her speech at the ceremony that in the past thirty years the Diplomacy Training Program has provided assistance to more than 3,000 human rights workers from over 60 countries in the Asia Pacific, Middle East, and North Africa, with training topics including human rights, indigenous peoples' rights, migrant workers' rights, environmental protection, and LGBTI+ rights.

“The Diplomacy Training Program has made it possible for the seeds of human rights to flourish and bear fruit around the world, and offer mutual support,” President Tsai said.

She pointed out that today is Human Rights Day but also a special day for Taiwan: “the 40th anniversary of the Kaohsiung Incident, a pivotal event in Taiwan's democratization.”

“In the 40 years since that time, everyone has taken a different path in life, and perhaps thinks differently about politics, or joined a different political party,” but this is exactly what is precious and endearing about Taiwan's democracy, she continued. “That year, our democratic predecessors showed incredible courage in resisting oppression by an authoritarian government, and helped give birth to the free and democratic Taiwan of today. The Kaohsiung Incident was a turning point in



Taiwan’ s path to democratization.”

“The people of Taiwan have not forgotten this historical memory. Because they have not forgotten, democracy has gradually been consolidated in Taiwan, and today we are contributing to global democracy and human rights initiatives through the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award,” President Tsai said.

TFD Chairman Su Jia-chyuan said in his speech that the DTP’ s vision and approach with which they have provided knowledge and skills to over 3,000 human rights defenders from various regions is “truly admirable,” and “Taiwanese people can effortlessly empathize with those who are now living under autocratic regimes, as we had also been through the ordeals for achieving and securing democracy, human rights, and freedom, and we esteem the altruistic contributions and sacrifice made by those selfless human rights defenders.”

Chairman Su also called on those countries and regions that are now pushing for democratization and endeavoring to join the free world, in the face of “Chinese authoritarian regime’ s invasion and infiltration in the democratic world today,” to “see Taiwan as a precedent and have confidence in democracy, freedom, and human rights, as democracy will without doubt prevail in the end.”

In his acceptance speech, DTP Executive Director Patrick Earle said the founder of DTP, Jose Ramos-Horta, is the former president of Timor-Leste and the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Until 1999, the year Timor-Leste exercised its self-determination right and attained independence, Mr. Ramos-Horta had been in exile and advocating for human rights and self-determination of Timor-Leste for more than 20 years. Over the years he has come to realize, based on his own experiences, that it is necessary “for human rights defenders and activists to learn



the law, the skills of diplomats, to build support inside and beyond governments, to make friends and build relationships.”

“From the beginning [the DTP has] focused on the “human” in human rights... Human rights standards are human responses to the reality of human wrongs. They express shared values of human dignity as well as the commitments made by governments,” he stressed.

Mr. Earle continued, “we do not always see the immediate results of what we do, but wherever we look we see DTP’ s 3000 plus alumni active in the human rights and democracy movements across Asia - in the movements challenging religious intolerance and discrimination, promoting the rights of women and gender equality, asserting the rights of Indigenous peoples, holding corporations accountable for their impacts, defending the environment, affirming the rights of migrant workers in countries of origin and destination, and the rights of persons with “disability” , protesting censorship. We see them in the movements defending democracy and the right to participate in decision making and demanding action on the climate emergency. Across their different issues, concerns and countries we see them find common cause in human rights.”

President Tsai at the same event also presented National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman with the Order of Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon, in recognition of his contribution to the consolidation of the Taiwan-US relations and the advancing of freedom and democracy around the world.

President Tsai said for many years, “the National Endowment for Democracy has kept a close and constant watch on democratic development around the world, which has been a great source of encouragement for advocacy groups in many countries. The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy is flourishing today, also due to

President Gershman's support.”

On this special day, President Tsai said she would like to again appeal to like-minded friends in the international community: “In the history of mankind, democracies have not been around that long. But history has proven that democracy is the most resilient political system, and can best resolve disputes and unite the will of the people. There are many countries and regions in our part of the world that are not yet on the path to democratization. And there are many people who seek democracy, freedom, and basic human rights, but are being oppressed and attacked by authoritarian governments. For Taiwanese, even when democracy has become as natural as breathing, we cannot forget that safeguarding democracy is our responsibility, and supporting democracy is our conviction. As Taiwanese have shown, people can change history. When many people unite as one, they have a chance to change the course of history.”

NED President Carl Gershman in his speech applauded Taiwan for its achievement in consolidating “a dynamic, stable, and successful liberal democracy, exemplified by President Tsai herself, who is the first woman to be elected President of Taiwan.”

“Elsewhere in the world, however, democracy has entered a period of crisis...The developments in China are the most disturbing,” he said.

Once China was seen by academics to have undergone “creeping democratization,” but as we all know now, “as China has become stronger economically, it has grown more repressive and bellicose,” President Gershman lamented, adding that China “is building a sinister surveillance state to control the population; committing cultural genocide against Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other minority peoples; threatening its neighbors militarily in the South China Sea and

beyond; and penetrating into countries around the world through its Belt and Road Initiative and its use of Sharp Power information and propaganda tools.”

“No country faces greater threats and pressures than Taiwan. These include ceaseless military exercises targeting Taiwan and diplomatic efforts to isolate it internationally; the use of Sharp Power to undermine it politically and of economic leverage to coerce it and subdue it through absorption; and clandestine operations to manipulate Taiwan’s elections, including 30 million cross-border cyber attacks every month since 2018,” he stressed.

But President Gershman believed all this bullying and attempted subversion have not had the desired effect. “As President Tsai said in her National Day Address, the threats and challenges faced by Taiwan ‘have made us stronger and more determined,’ and they have contributed to an increasingly robust sense of national pride and identity.”

“It is the example of Taiwan itself that now inspires people everywhere who believe in democracy,” he said, adding that it offers a vision for a better future, a different kind of dream that may once again capture the imagination of those who are striving for democracy today. “Because of Taiwan’s sacrifice and commitment, I believe that day will come.”

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