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ECPAT International receives Taiwan human rights award (update)

2012/12/10 14:06:14



Taipei, Dec. 10 (CNA) ECPAT International of Thailand received a human rights award in Taipei on Monday in recognition of its dedication to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Asia.

President Ma Ying-jeou presented the award to ECPAT International Chairwoman Maureen Crombie at a ceremony on Human Rights Day.

"Without human rights, there can be no democracy," Ma said, adding that there are no national boundaries regarding such issues.

The 2012 Asian Democracy and Human Rights Award was established by the non-profit, non-partisan Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) in 2006 to support individuals and organizations that demonstrate outstanding leadership in the peaceful promotion of democratic development and human rights in Asia.

ECPAT was selected for this year's award because of its efforts to "end child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes," according to the organizers.

At the ceremony, Ma said Taiwan has also been working against commercial sexual exploitation of children, by enacting relevant laws and actively enforcing them.

Child prostitution and trafficking have been decreasing over the past few years in Taiwan, but child abuse cases remain high, he said, adding that the government will continue its fight against such wrongs.

In response, Crombie praised Taiwan's efforts in that regard and urged more countries to join the fight.

"We cannot do this alone," she said, noting that the problem exists in every corner around the world.

With advanced information technology, people can post child pornography material on the Internet, and thus the problem continues to grow, becoming more complex and difficult to solve, Crombie said.

Established in 1991 to stop child sex tourism in Asia, the ECPAT network now has more than 80 groups in over 70 countries worldwide, including Taiwan. They are all independent organizations or coalitions working against commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Outside the venue of the presentation ceremony, other local civic rights groups staged a protest, criticizing the government as failing to protect its people and instead hurting citizens' human rights.

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The groups said a worsening labor market, poor judicial and economic human rights and media monopoly were among 10 examples Taiwan's failings in the area of human rights in 2012.

According to a recent annual survey by the Taipei-based Chinese Association for Human Rights, over 40 percent of people in Taiwan have a negative perception of overall human rights protection in the country.

(By James Lee)
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