

NGO receives Taiwan human rights award

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By Joseph Yeh--President Ma Ying-jeou yesterday awarded the annual Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award to an international NGO to honor its contributions to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

In a Taipei ceremony coinciding with Human Rights day, Ma presented the award to Maureen Crombie, chairwoman of End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, or ECPAT

International.

During his address, Ma praised Crombie and her organization for their efforts to end child sex trafficking and exploitation.

The president said that Taiwan has been working against the commercial sexual exploitation of children locally by enacting new laws and actively enforcing them.

The government's efforts have brought concrete results and reported cases of child prostitution have significantly decreased over the years, Ma said.

He added, however, that there is still room for improvement as more and more instances of child abuse occur.

Accepting the award, Crombie expressed her gratitude and praised Taiwan's anti-child sex trade efforts, but warned that with as many as 1.8 million children being exploited through prostitution or pornography worldwide, there is still a tough road ahead.

"We cannot do this alone," she said, urging more countries to join the fight.

Established in 1991 to stop child sex tourism in Asia, ECPAT International, with its headquarters based in Thailand, now has more than 80 offices in over 70 countries, including Taiwan.

Crombie said the group will continue to prevent children from being exploited, and will provide education and services to children in need.

Taiwan Improves a Lot: Crombie

During an interview with local media following yesterday's ceremony, Crombie said Taiwan has made significant improvements and is no longer a preferred destination for child sex tourism thanks to the local government's reinforcement of the legal child protection framework.

The challenges Taiwan faces are the same as other countries, particularly concerning advances in information technology that make the sexual exploitation of children harder to detect.

Taiwan should be sure to make timely changes to regulations, law enforcement and social care services to keep up with the fast-changing world, she said.

Unfortunately, Taiwan is not recognized by the United Nations, making it difficult to receive global recognition for its efforts, Crombie said.

The annual Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award was established by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy in 2006 to support individuals and organizations that have actively promoted democratic development or advocated human rights through peaceful means in Asia.

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