

0626EADF TFD President Liao Speech

Colleagues from the EADF, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Welcome to the 2019 East Asia Democracy Forum.

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, for more than a decade, has been promoting democracy and human rights both in this country and around the world. Our job has proved to be more difficult, but also all the more important in the recent years, as we are facing mounting pressure from stronger authoritarian regimes and their attempts to make other countries bow to their political demands.

We are determined to continue our endeavor in upholding democracy and human rights. As many of you have already known, Taiwan has made great strides in advancing democracy and human rights this year. Last month, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed the law that guarantees the right of same-sex couples to register their marriage, as their fellow heterosexual couples do. The achievement was not only Taiwan's; as Asia's first, it is "a landmark move for the rest of the world" according to the Washington Post, as it flies in the face of the belief or excuse many uphold that human rights and liberal ideas are merely Western concoctions and not for Asians.

Narratives, such as the belief in Asian values that I just mentioned, can be instrumental in perpetrating prejudices and stereotypes when espoused with partial truth or false information. Since 2017, the idea of "sharp power" has been brought up and has raised global awareness of the impact of the authoritarian regimes. The sharp power, as described in the report of the National Endowment for Democracy, "pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries." And we are alerted of this kind of power or influence that takes advantage of our free and open environment and instills their political interests and ideologies that run counter to democratic values.

The risk of democracy being pierced and penetrated by the authoritarian influence has been amplified by the unboundedness of and anonymity in the cyberspace. In the recent years, democracies are encountering greater intimidation on the Internet. Disinformation has been used with ill intent to make biases more entrenched and polarize the society, which in turn affect how people view the government and politicians and how people vote.

In light of this challenge, in last year's forum, we talked about how democracies should work together to combat disinformation and develop counter-narratives to the authoritarian models that have been upheld as superior to democratic institutions. Following the same vein, at this

year's EADF, we are again discussing but further focusing on the issues of authoritarian regimes exerting their influence, overtly or covertly, in the democratic societies via Internet and media.

With the help of technology, authoritarian regimes are now able to disturb democracies by polarizing the society and stirring up conflicts via online operations. The online operations include a wide range of maneuvers from spreading plain disinformation and generating fake accounts to purchasing fan pages. The manipulated public opinion could not only provoke the people's anger toward their government but also damage their confidence in the democratic system.

Authoritarian regimes are also attempting to expand their influence in democracies through financial investments, political donations, and producing media narratives in line with their political interests. Together with online operations, the authoritarian powers now not only impose censorship within their own countries but are able to silence those with different views around the world, including governments and international organizations.

Despite being a democracy with a vibrant civil society, Taiwan bears the brunt of the pressure and bully from its big neighbor and the negligence of the world. But Taiwanese people are resolute in our belief in democratic values and aspire to continue working with and supporting those who are also striving for their freedom and rights. We have voiced support for Hong Kong protestors in their defiance against encroachment on their liberties, and we have also condemned Beijing for depriving Uyghur people of their freedom and rights to practice their religion and keep their culture. And we are determined to do more. This forum is part of our determination to engage democracy advocates and activists across the region and form a solid and strong network of shared values. We hope this forum can continue to have your support and serve as a platform where ideas can be exchanged freely and without fear of censorship. Thank you.