

Press Release

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The 2019 Asia Young Leaders for Democracy (AYLD) Program Closes in Taipei



The 2019 Asia Young Leaders for Democracy (AYLD), an annual program organized by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, closed yesterday in Taipei. The program this year brought together young democracy and human rights practitioners from over 10 countries in Asia, including Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand, to engage with local NGOs and experts throughout the course of six days.

This year's AYLD program invited experts in the fields of democracy and human rights to speak and exchange ideas with the participants. Pastor Lazarus Chen, the keynote speaker for AYLD's opening, shared how Taiwan's civil society faced opposition from the conservative religious groups when campaigning for the legalization of same-sex marriage. The program also saw other distinguished speakers talk about the indigenous peoples' movement in Taiwan, participatory democracy, combating disinformation, strengthening cyber security, and media literacy.

In addition to the lectures and workshops, the participants were invited to introduce the state of democracy in their own countries and what the barriers are for them to better the institutions and enhance public participation and awareness. They were then tasked to get into groups with different "action plans" that they believe could be implemented to solve the problems they brought up earlier.

Three action plans were presented by the participants, each with its own practical concerns and relevance. A group focused on election monitoring in the general election in Myanmar in 2020, where democratic transition has just recently started and enhancement of voters' education and awareness is crucial.

Another group of participants drafted the idea of forming a regional alliance among local CSOs that promote and protect migrant workers' rights, pointing out that while currently there are inter-government-level talks on migrant workers, cross-region collaboration among civil societies is still lacking.

Having the problems of lack of participation and interest in politics and of the tendency of online discussions becoming radicalized and polarized in mind, the third action plan proposed was to stimulate democratic participation and deliberation by coming up with executable modules for groups or individuals in countries with different political contexts to set up their own off-line discussion classes.

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy President Ford Fu-Te Liao in his closing remarks thanked the participants for their active participation, encouraging the participants to find new approaches to and new thinking in their advocacy work based on what they have learned from the program. "It would be this program's achievement if your actions plans get to be implemented or taken as reference when you go back to your democracy and human rights promotion work in your home countries," he stressed.

The participants also visited Dadaocheng, Nylon Cheng Liberty Foundation, Brilliant Time Bookstore, the Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, and the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park, with White Terror victim Chin Him-san as their guide in the park, during the program.

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