

Press Release

June 26th, 2018

The Fifth East Asia Democracy Forum in Taipei

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy held the fifth East Asia Democracy Forum in Taipei on June 26th. The theme of this year's forum is "Prevent Democratic Backsliding." Democracies around the world are experiencing various predicaments, including the loss of confidence in the democratic system in those more mature democracies and the democratic regression in the new and fragile democracies. The core values of democracy such as freedom of speech, freedom of press and political and social pluralism are encountering great challenges in the era of social media and new informational technologies and in a time when authoritarian regimes are offering what they call the "alternative model."

In light of this, the 2018 Fifth East Asia Democracy Forum invited those democracy advocates and defenders who have been fighting for democracy, via this forum as a platform, to discuss how to protect freedom of speech, combat disinformation, develop counter-narratives to show how democratic norms can complement traditional values, and prevent democratic principles from being manipulated to suppress democratic norms.

TFD President Szu-chien Hsu said in the opening remarks that the East Asia Democracy Forum, or EADF, is one of the flagship forums for the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. "The goal for this forum is to provide a platform for civil society organizations and individuals to discuss, strategize and join efforts to advance democracy and human rights in the North, Southeast and South Asia. In the past few years, the EADF was held in countries such as Japan and Mongolia. Last year, we brought the EADF back to Taipei, and we are again holding the forum in Taipei this year," he said.

President Hsu raised concerns about the development of the democracy in Asia: "Democracies in the Asia Pacific region have the commonality of experiencing pressure externally and from inside. Externally, we face authoritarian regimes' aggressive attempt to promote its counter narrative, saying democratic systems are inefficient, chaotic and sluggish, and the authoritarian model is productive, effective



and efficient. Internally, disgruntled segment of population are growing increasingly impatient, as socioeconomic inequality grew, while populism and extremism extends its tentacles in societies.”

He called attention to the worrying signs of democratic backsliding in many countries in Asia today. “In facing these internal and external challenges, the goal of this year’s EADF, is to come together to think about and develop plans to safeguard our hard-earned democracy. As democrats, we have the responsibility and obligation to do so. We should begin to inform each other of authoritarian activities in our respective countries and assist and support one another to fend off such encroachment and prevent such corrosion. I believe, we can be successful in combating such decomposition when we work together,” he added.

The four panelists of this year's EADF came from the Philippines, Indonesia and Taiwan. They illustrated the hurdles of their respective democracy has come to encounter, which include disinformation, the compatibility of religious/traditional values and democratic values, and how the democrats can fight/communicate with those with opposing ideas in the society through democratic means.

Mandeep Singh, manager of Bersih 2.0, or the Coalition for Clean and Fair Election, was invited by the TFD to give a speech at the EADF as well. Bersih 2.0 was also the 2017 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award laureate.

Malaysia has achieved last month its first transition of political power since its independence in 1957. Calling himself a “proud Malaysian,” Singh’s remarks met applause from the audience.

“For the past years, doors of the government institutions were shut and closed for us...only the prison doors were open for us. Today, reform became a household name,” he said. “But the change did not come easily; it took years of hard work from among the members of the civil society, political parties, international and regional solidarity movement and Malaysians.”

Singh encouraged his fellow human rights defenders who are experiencing hardships to remain positive. “Do not despair. Do not give up in fighting that you want in your country. Do not stop mobilizing and organizing. Repressive regimes will



never cease to divide us, but we cannot be afforded to be divided at any given time.
Remember, people power can never be defeated.”

Media Contact:

Alison Hsiao

Tel: +886-2-2708-0100 #606

Email: alison@tfd.org.tw

Olivia Yang

Tel: +886-2-2708-0100 #607

Email: olivia@tfd.org.tw