

2019 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award

Remarks by President Tsai Ing-wen

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy Chairman Su;
Secretary-General Lee;
Diplomacy Training Program Representative, Executive
Director Earle;
US National Endowment for Democracy President
Gershman;
Dean of the diplomatic corps and Ambassador to Taiwan
Tapia; Distinguished guests:
Good morning.

I would like to welcome everyone to this award ceremony. Today is a special day. It's not only Human Rights Day, but also the 40th anniversary of the Kaohsiung Incident, a pivotal event in Taiwan's democratization.

A few days ago, I was in Kaohsiung to take part in a march to commemorate the Kaohsiung Incident. I returned to the historical scene of the incident, together with some of the original participants and their defense attorneys.

In the 40 years since that time, everyone has taken a different path in life, and perhaps thinks differently about politics, or joined a different political party.

This is precisely what is precious and endearing about Taiwan's democracy. That year, our democratic predecessors showed incredible courage in resisting oppression by an authoritarian government, and helped give birth to the free and democratic Taiwan of today. The Kaohsiung Incident was a turning point in Taiwan's path to democratization.

The people of Taiwan have not forgotten this historical memory. Because they have not forgotten, democracy has gradually been consolidated in Taiwan, and today we are contributing to global democracy and human rights initiatives through the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award.

The winner of this year's Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award is an organization devoted to transnational empowerment, the Diplomacy Training Program.

The Diplomacy Training Program was founded in 1989 by former Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta, and Emeritus Professor Garth Nettheim.

Mr. Ramos-Horta had sought international support and called for global action to stop human rights violations in Timor-Leste before its independence. That experience inspired him to advocate for “people’s diplomacy,” which links civil society and international human rights mechanisms to seek effective remedial measures.

Over the past 30 years, the Diplomacy Training Program has provided assistance to more than 3,000 human rights workers from over 60 countries in the Asia Pacific, Middle East, and North Africa. Training topics have included human rights, indigenous peoples’ rights, migrant workers’ rights, environmental protection, and LGBTI+ rights.

The Diplomacy Training Program has made it possible for the seeds of human rights to flourish and bear fruit around the world, and offer mutual support.

We have another distinguished guest here at today’s ceremony whose contributions deserve special mention. That is Mr. Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy.

For many years, the National Endowment for Democracy



has kept a close and constant watch on democratic development around the world, which has been a great source of encouragement for advocacy groups in many countries. The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy is flourishing today, also due to President Gershman's support.

The Diplomacy Training Program, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy all share the same objectives: the continuous promotion of universal values of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

Today is Human Rights Day, and also the 40th anniversary of the Kaohsiung Incident, so I want to appeal to like-minded friends in the international community:

In the history of mankind, democracies have not been around that long. But history has proven that democracy is the most resilient political system, and can best resolve disputes and unite the will of the people.

There are many countries and regions in our part of the world that are not yet on the path to democratization. And there are many people who seek democracy,



freedom, and basic human rights, but are being oppressed and attacked by authoritarian governments.

For Taiwanese, even when democracy has become as natural as breathing, we cannot forget that safeguarding democracy is our responsibility, and supporting democracy is our conviction.

As Taiwanese have shown, people can change history. When many people unite as one, they have a chance to change the course of history.

So let's join hands, and continue to work together for democracy, freedom, and human rights. Thank you.