

TAIWAN AND THE UNITED NATIONS  
A SPEECH  
BY  
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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE GAMBIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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*Dr. Chen,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is always a pleasure for me to seize on any occasion that presents itself to speak up for Taiwan. This occasion, though, is special in that it is an international forum convened outside of the United Nations, about the United Nations and Taiwan. As a Permanent Representative to the United Nations, it is not often that I have an opportunity to levitate, as it were, and view from the outside, with outsiders, what I and other like-minded colleagues do within the UN in respect of the question of Taiwan. In that respect therefore, this occasion is unique.

But perhaps I should first explain to you what we do to promote the Taiwan cause, as well as how we do it.

There are twenty-six member states of the UN that have established formal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan). They are from Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America and the Pacific. They may for the most part, be small, but they are sovereign and equal members of the organisation. They therefore have the same rights, responsibilities and privileges as any other member state. These twenty-six countries at the UN have organized themselves into a “Group of Friends of Taiwan” with The Gambia as Chairman and Tuvalu, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, El Salvador and Nicaragua as Coordinators. The Chairman and coordinators operate as the Bureau of the Group. It is within this Group that positions are

taken in respect of Taiwan's relations with the United Nations, and strategies crafted to promote the cause. The Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York serves as the Group's Secretariat.

I should add that the Holy See, which enjoys Observer Status with the UN, is the only European State that has officially recognized Taiwan's sovereignty. Because it is only an Observer State, it is not a member of the Group of Friends.

The objective of the Group is to secure a seat for Taiwan at the United Nations. We seek to attain our objective by requesting the Secretary-General of the UN, before the beginning of each session of the General Assembly, to inscribe an additional item on the agenda having to do with the representation of Taiwan at the United Nations. We annex to our letter, an extensive memorandum explaining our reasons for the request as well as another one proposing a draft resolution for adoption. Our letter and the annexes are then circulated as a General Assembly document. They become the subject of a debate in the General Committee – which consists of the Bureau of the Session, but is also open to other member states. This debate takes place shortly after the formal opening of the session – usually the day after. This year's debate will be the eleventh time we have sought to have this inscription allowed using this process. Each year, our request is turned down.

Our request is turned down because every time, the People's Republic of China is able to marshal a far larger number of speakers than we can, to oppose the request. And although in the campaign prior to the debate itself, many delegations show much sympathy with our position, political pressure is placed upon their capitals to secure the requisite instructions to them not to support the request. Even so, it is clear to all of us that are involved in the campaign that many, many governments the world over, would dearly love to see Taiwan seated at the United Nations. They say as much to us, and many of them would show their support by not intervening in the debate. But the political pressures - even blackmail – force them to refrain from coming out openly in support of Taiwan.

On what do we justify our request to the Secretary-General?

There are at least six reasons why Taiwan should be accepted into the membership of the UN.

First, is the UN Charter itself. The principle of universality enshrined in the Charter provides that ALL peace-loving nations of the world have the right of membership in the UN. By that provision, Taiwan eminently qualifies to take a seat at the General Assembly. If sovereignty means the ability to exercise effective governance and authority over a defined geographical area, including the power to exercise the use of force within that territory, while at the same time, having the authority to maintain diplomatic, trade, economic and political relations with other sovereign nations, then Taiwan is in fact, a sovereign nation. There is in place in Taiwan, a functioning democratic system with the three major arms of government operating efficiently, effectively and independently of each other; a vibrant multi-party democracy, with Presidential and parliamentary elections every four years; a national security and defence mechanism that is fully under the command of a Head of State who was chosen by the Taiwanese people; and diplomatic and other relations with the whole world. Taiwan therefore meets the criterion of sovereignty, to qualify for membership in the UN.

Taiwan is a peace-loving nation. But for its determination to avoid confrontation with its hostile, next-door neighbour, open conflict would by now have flared across the Taiwan Strait. Even though the people of Taiwan live under a constant threat of attack from the PRC, with hundreds of Chinese missiles trained on them, they continue to redouble their efforts to maintain peaceful co-existence with their mainland neighbour. Taiwan is therefore a peace-loving nation.

The Taiwanese people have their own economic, political, social and cultural systems that distinguish them from the PRC. This further underscores the fact of their independence, thereby meeting the criterion set by the principle of self-determination as enshrined in the UN Charter, as well as in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

By all the conditions laid down in the UN Charter for qualification to membership in the UN therefore, the ban against Taiwan cannot be justified.

Second, is the de facto existence of Taiwan in the global system. Taiwan is not a myth or an idea. It is a reality. It is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. It is among the top twelve most important trading nations of the world. It ranks at the top amongst the nations that lead in the provision of

foreign direct investments the world over. A country like this has to assume certain international responsibilities by virtue of the importance of its place in the international system. It can only do so through full membership in the United Nations.

In this new Millennium, in the year 2003, nations of the world must behave differently towards each other. We are not in 1903, or even in 1949. Sovereignty today is defined more by expediency than by anything else. We have been witnessing a greater tendency towards integration into bigger political and economic blocs to increase countries' chances of security and survival, which, in the process, has reduced the individual sovereignty of those concerned. Increasingly, national sovereignty is losing importance to collective economic, political and social security. It is no longer a strong argument for barring any nation from joining the UN.

Third, is the fact of the importance of Taiwan's place in the global system of production, trade and other international transactions. The international system must recognize that Taiwan is a country where industries of all types operate. They may contribute to the pollution of the earth if their activities are not controlled by internationally agreed regulations. Taiwan is a major international financial center. How do we ensure that it observes clean practices in its dealings with the rest of the international financial community, and does not become a haven for unsavoury activities such as money-laundering? Taiwan is a major trading nation. Fortunately, the WTO has taken cognizance of this fact and has brought Taiwan in as an observer. A lot of scientific and technological R&D takes place in Taiwan. As an international system, do we not want to know whether Taiwanese scientists are complying with internationally-agreed ethical standards that bind the world's scientific, medical and technological research community? If Taiwan is not formally made part of the international community through membership in the UN, how can we regulate their activities in, say, human cloning research? Taiwan is a major transportation hub in their own part of the world. It is a major air transport and maritime nation. What is its status in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) or the International Maritime Organisation?

These are the valid questions that led to Taiwan's application for Observer status as a "Health Entity" with the World Health Assembly, especially in view of the need for heightened cooperation among all nations of the world in monitoring and controlling the behaviour and spread of new pathogens

like Ebola, SARS, etc. This form of cooperation is also desperately needed to ensure that experiences are widely shared, and that the scientific, technological and medical research community are free of those political and ideological constraints that would reduce the impact of their work on the health of the world's people. Unfortunately, ideology and politics interfered with Taiwan's bid for this form of association with the WHA, and for the third year running, its application was turned down.

The point I am trying to make was vividly demonstrated recently with the SARS epidemic. Even though this is not a political problem, but a medical, human and humanitarian one, political posturing by the PRC made the cooperation that such an emergency called for from the international community, impossible to bring to bear on the solution of the problem. The PRC where, in fact, the problem originated, would not work with the Taiwanese authorities. What is more, they barred the Canadians, the Thais, the Indonesians and more than twenty other countries, which dearly wanted to cooperate among themselves, as a scientific/medical community to address the problem, from doing so with Taiwan. Even the World Health Organisation was, for the same reason, slow to respond to Taiwan's plea for assistance. It took the protest of my Government to get them to act, by sending, belatedly, two medical experts to work with the emergency team in Taiwan.

This truly was disgraceful. And the United Nations should learn a big lesson from the SARS experience with Taiwan. Today, it is SARS, tomorrow it will be terrorism, or weapons of mass destruction, or another EXXON-VALDES, or any number of problems on which TOTAL global cooperation is needed. How do we assure the cooperation of the 23 million people of Taiwan, when they are not even formally recognized by the United Nations?

The fourth point I want to make is in respect of representation. We keep hearing protestations from the PRC that Taiwan is adequately represented by them. All we know is that since 1949, no one speaks for the government and people of Taiwan in the United Nations. No one monitors, analyses, documents or reports on the demographic, economic, political or social situation in Taiwan except the authorities of Taiwan themselves. At the UN no one represents Taiwan, because Taiwan is in fact not represented at all at this world body.

When General Assembly Resolution 2758 of 1971 was passed, it simply decreed that it was the PRC, not Taiwan that would henceforth represent China at the UN. It did not say that the people of Taiwan could not have their own separate representation at the UN. It did not proclaim that Taiwan was part of the PRC, nor did it authorize the PRC to represent Taiwan at the UN.

Fifth, Taiwan has demonstrated over the years that it is able and willing to live up to the principles and ideals of the United Nations. It has amply shown its total commitment to democracy and human rights, as exemplified by an efficient, functioning multi-party democratic system and an impressive record on human rights. The International Bill of Rights has been ratified by the Legislative Yuan into a “Taiwan Bill of Rights”. Overtures have been made to the International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International to assist in increasing Taiwan’s already strong capacity to protect human rights and individual freedoms. In every other area of international concern and action, Taiwan has, unsolicited, taken the necessary measures to ensure compliance.

Which leads us to the sixth reason why Taiwan cannot be ignored by the United Nations. A major part of the UN mandate is development cooperation and the provision of humanitarian assistance to the needy. The UN Agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, FAO and WFP account for a good proportion of the UN’s intervention in developing countries, is support of the poor. Taiwan has, of its own volition, provided hundreds of millions of dollars in development assistance to the developing countries with which it has formal relations. It has provided more than 10,000 experts under technical assistance arrangements to countries in Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Pacific. On the humanitarian plane, Taiwan has contributed disaster relief to many countries around the world, including the PRC. It has also responded to UN appeals for relief and rehabilitation for countries afflicted by natural disasters or the aftermath of war. What else must it do to show solidarity with the world’s down trodden as called for by the UN Charter?

In sum, these are, *grosso modo*, the arguments the Group of Friends of Taiwan employ in making their case for the UN to inscribe an additional agenda item on the General Assembly, having to do with the question of the representation of Taiwan at the UN. As I have already mentioned, every year, for the past ten years, this request has been made. And every year, it

has been turned down. I have heard many supporters of the request say that they do not care how long it takes, they will keep on making the request to the world body, until it is acceded to, and action is taken to right one of the greatest wrongs in history. My Government is fully committed to this objective, for it is the only thing that is just and deserving of the friendly people of The Republic of China (Taiwan).

I thank you for your kind attention.