

Building Up Taiwan, Invigorating Chinese Heritage

Vice President Siew, Presidents of the Five Yuan, Senior Officials, Fellow Countrymen, and Overseas Compatriots:

Good morning and greetings to all!

Today marks the first day of the Republic of China's centennial year, a day worthy of celebration and thanksgiving.

Pledges from a Century Ago

A century ago, as China was besieged by foreign powers and on the verge of collapse, Dr. Sun Yat-sen overthrew the Qing court and founded the Republic of China—the first republic in all of Asia. He made a pledge to the people to build a strong and prosperous nation.

A century ago, Chinese history consisted only of the succession of dynasties, and the people had no say in the matter. The establishment of the Republic of China was a pledge to the people to bring about a democratic way of life.

A century ago, Chinese society was plagued by a severe wealth gap and widespread illiteracy. The establishment of the Republic of China was a pledge to the people to bring about equitable distribution of wealth and education for everyone.

These pledges embody the ideals of the Three Principles of the People. Passed down through generations, they have been enshrined in our Constitution and indelibly etched into our lives.

Today, with gratitude in our hearts, we pay our utmost respect to the martyrs and heroes of the Republic. Were it not for people like Lin Jue-min, who left his beloved wife for the cause, or Qiu Jin, who was martyred for her revolutionary ideals, or the countless other heroes and heroines who laid down their lives, the ROC would not be here today.

A Century of Stirring Achievements

The story of the ROC over the past century is the history of the struggle to build a nation, of course, but it is also more than that. It is a saga of the toil and tears of a revolt against imperialism. Even more, it is a stirring ode to the role our forefathers played in the restoration of order to a world of chaos.

In the early years of the Republic, the country was fractured by warlord satrapies. The National Government organized the Northern Expedition against them and united China, ushering in a decade of national development. Thereafter, the ROC crushed Japan's ambitions over China in an eight-year war of resistance, and abrogated unequal treaties that had been in place for a century. As a result, Taiwan was returned to the fold of the Republic of China.

At the end of World War II, the ROC played a pivotal role in the restoration of world order. It was a founding member of the United Nations, and contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, infusing into it the spirit of Confucianism.

In 1946, National Assembly delegates chosen in elections held throughout the nation gathered in Nanjing to formulate the most progressive democratic constitution in Asia. In the process of their deliberations, they succeeded in melding the essence of Chinese culture with the core features of Western democracy.

Following defeat in the Civil War and the loss of the Chinese mainland to the communists in

1949, the government relocated to Taiwan. This was a major setback for the Republic of China, but it did not dishearten or discourage us. Instead, we drew lessons from these painful experiences, rebuilt the nation, and gradually realized the ideals of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in Taiwan.

Over the past six decades, the ROC government has implemented in Taiwan a series of reforms, beginning with capping farmland rent at 37.5 percent of the harvest, and transferring land from landlords to farmers. Private enterprises were nurtured, the Ten Major Construction Projects were launched, and industries were upgraded. We abolished the abusive “foster daughter system,” set up a labor insurance scheme, established nine-year compulsory education, introduced the National Health Insurance program, and instituted the national pension system. We also implemented local self-government, lifted martial law, repealed the ban on political party formation, abolished the Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion, and redressed the wrongs perpetrated in the February 28 Incident of 1947 and the period of “white terror.” We opened all parliamentary seats to election, held direct popular elections for the presidency, and realized the peaceful transfer of power between political parties.

These reforms are more than just historical milestones; they have made the ROC a paragon of political and economic progress for developing nations around the world and have dispelled the myth that democracy is unsuitable for a Chinese society.

Today, the ROC is universally respected in the international community. We send aid missions around the world, our high-technology products are sold globally, our passports allow visa-free entry to 96 nations and territories, our innovative ability has won international acclaim, and our young people dazzle on the world stage. We are brimming with confidence.

Our Collective Homeland

My fellow countrymen, all of us in today’s Taiwan have together experienced the growth and transformation of this land. We possess collective memories and experiences. We all experienced the thrill as our baseball teams achieved international glory, we all felt the indignation as we lost our seat in the United Nations, and we have all shed tears of pride upon seeing our national flag hoisted at international events.

Yes, that blue, white and red flag symbolizing Heaven, Sun and Earth unites us, inspires us, and moves us. It gave the Eight Hundred Heroes the strength to fight valiantly in defending the Sihang Warehouse in Shanghai back in 1937. That flag is a collective memory we have all had since we were young, and is a rallying point for our patriotism.

As President, I bear the solemn responsibility of continuing the past while leading the way toward the future, adhering to the principle of “putting Taiwan first for the benefit of the people.” And I have always kept in mind what President Chiang Ching-kuo said when, as Premier, he was preparing to implement the Ten Major Construction Projects: “If we don’t act today, we’ll regret it tomorrow.” That is why my administration has plucked up its courage and started implementing major reforms that several past administrations could not carry out. These include streamlining the Executive Yuan, merging and upgrading certain cities and counties, passing the Rural Regeneration Act, and implementing the national pension scheme and second-generation National Health Insurance program. We have also promoted cross-strait rapprochement, which has transformed the Taiwan Strait from a flashpoint for conflict into an avenue of peace.

Foundation for a Century of Prosperity

My fellow citizens, the coming decade is key to our nation's continued development and progress. We must make it a "Golden Decade" that lays the foundation for a prosperous second century of the Republic of China. Let us make this Golden Decade one of peace, infrastructural development, and well-being.

I harbor four hopes for the future:

First, I want educational reforms that provide a lasting solution—Education is the cornerstone of national power, and children are our hope for the future. To create a sounder educational environment for our young people, I am announcing today that education in Taiwan will now enter upon a new era. Starting this year, we will begin a phased implementation of twelve-year compulsory education, starting with vocational high schools. The tentative plan is that, by 2014, attending high school and vocational high school will be tuition-free and in most cases require no entrance examination. We will also expand support for preschool education. Beginning this year, school tuition for five-year-olds will be waived. As fiscal resources permit, this will gradually be extended to three- and four-year-olds to further alleviate their parents' financial burden. However, preschool education will not be made mandatory.

We fully understand that a dearth of young people will severely affect our national power, so the government will work to boost the birth rate by simultaneously addressing each aspect of the problem: marriage, birth, childrearing, and education.

Second, I want environmental stewardship that provides lasting viability—The greatest challenge of this century is global climate change while the greatest opportunity is the digital technology revolution. We already have a comprehensive plan for reconfiguring national land use and our disaster preparedness systems, developing new energy industries, as well as implementing energy saving and carbon reduction to bequeath a good environment to future generations. Taiwan's economy must be transformed. Environmentally unfriendly industries must be eliminated. A green economy is the trend of the future and a major focal point of economic policy. We must ensure that the ROC has every opportunity for sustainable development.

To meet the challenge of the digital era, we will promote digital high-definition television and go all out to build a broadband infrastructure to speed up the Internet, enhance its quality, and cut the cost of access. We intend to ensure that the digital lifestyle is a fundamental right of all citizens.

Third, I want lasting justice—We will forge a just and fair society where there is equal opportunity for development, the judiciary is impartial and clean, the gap between rich and poor is reduced, and human rights are safeguarded.

Our society is deeply compassionate and caring. In the future, the government will join with volunteers and work hard to reduce the developmental gap between urban and rural areas and between north and south. We will also address the digital divide.

We will continue promoting participatory reform of the judicial system, making an all-out effort to improve it in terms of fairness, quality, and efficiency, so as to provide a firmer safeguard for human rights and win back public trust in the judiciary.

The senior citizen population in Taiwan continues to grow steadily. We are now living in an aged society, so we must actively promote long-term care insurance. We must have enough caregivers and provide adequate care facilities so that seniors will receive better social services and health care support. We must build a "senior-friendly" society where the needs of senior citizens are factored as a matter of course into the designs of buildings and public infrastructure, so that those in the older generation can lead healthy, worry-free, and comfortable lives.

Equitable distribution of wealth was an ideal championed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. We will make taxation fairer, improve conditions for finding employment and starting a business, and enhance the social welfare system. Only then can the fruits of economic growth be enjoyed by the entire populace.

And fourth, I want a lasting peace—Peace in the Taiwan Strait is the foundation for peace and prosperity throughout East Asia, and is the joint responsibility of both parties in the relationship. Over the past two years and more, working within the framework of the ROC Constitution, we have preserved the status quo of “no unification, no independence, and no use of military force” and resumed talks with mainland China on the basis of the 1992 consensus, whereby each side maintains its respective definition of “one China.” To date, this has brought about direct cross-strait flights, opened the door for mainland tourists to visit Taiwan, and enabled mainland students to study here. It has also resulted in the signing of 15 cross-strait accords, including the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement. As a consequence, tension in the Taiwan Strait has been dramatically reduced, thereby contributing to regional stability and prosperity.

We believe that the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a common desire to shelve disputes and strive for long-term peaceful development of cross-strait ties. The authorities on both sides should put an end to conflict via rapprochement, and replace confrontation with cooperation. At this stage, any advocacy of a unilateral change to the status quo would affect the peaceful development of cross-strait relations. As both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a common ancestry dating back to legendary emperors Yen and Huang, we should enhance mutual understanding, build mutual trust, and gradually dispel differences of opinion via in-depth exchanges. Guided by the wisdom of our common ethnic Chinese culture, we can surely work out a very satisfactory solution.

Visions for the Future

My fellow citizens, as the Republic of China begins its second century we should set our sights on the future and make four lofty resolutions:

In the next century, the ROC will be the standard-bearer at the leading edge of Chinese culture. Taiwan has never experienced anything like mainland China’s Cultural Revolution. Having preserved the rich roots of Chinese culture intact over the past six decades or so, Taiwan now dazzles the world with an aesthetic sense and artistic verve that are firmly grounded in a deep vein of traditional culture.

Taiwan also possesses the openness and innovation of a maritime culture. Traditional Chinese culture on this island early on absorbed the essence of Western contemporary civilization, which is manifested in its innovative art. Our dance, music, drama, visual arts, motion pictures, and television programming command high international acclaim and are reflective of a Chinese culture with Taiwan characteristics.

Among all the ethnically Chinese societies of the world, Confucian values are practiced more widely and more seriously in Taiwan than anywhere else. The virtues espoused by Confucianism—benevolence, righteousness, filial devotion, respect for teachers, diligence, kindness, and simplicity—have long been deeply ingrained in the fabric of our lives. Taiwan is also home to a strong civil society, a diversity of religious groups and other organizations, a free press, and an active volunteer force. We need only display our cultural creativity to the world to attract the

world to us. Taiwan is poised to be the standard-bearer at the leading edge of Chinese culture.

In the next century, the ROC will serve as a paragon of democracy for the Chinese-speaking world. The ROC is a nation with its own independent sovereignty. The existence of the ROC not only ensures the security and dignity of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu, but also proves that ethnic Chinese can indeed tread a new path of freedom and democracy. Our democracy is young, but it has given birth to a vigorous multiparty system. Democracy is Taiwan's strength and pride, and is the foundation on which ruling and opposition parties compete and cooperate.

We hope one day that all descendents of Emperors Yen and Huang will enjoy freedom, democracy, and rule of law, as we do here in Taiwan. This is not a far-off dream, because these values have all been realized in Taiwan. They are not exclusive to the West. Taiwan's experience can serve as a reference for the future development of mainland China.

The two sides of the Taiwan Strait should not quarrel over political power, independence versus reunification, or Taiwan's breathing room on the international stage. We should instead focus on encouraging and helping each other grow in terms of the core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law. We care about how human rights develop in mainland China because it is a core value we hold dear. It is a key yardstick against which to measure the distance between us, and a tool for bringing us closer together.

In the next century, the ROC will become a global innovation center. Experience teaches us that the greatest amount of added value comes from innovation, research, and development. The farther a nation develops these areas, the stronger it will be.

Taiwan's industrial sector has begun a gradual move from being a supplier of OEM goods to being an innovator with its own brands. Year after year our firms are among the world's top patent recipients. Our young people consistently put on a good showing at international inventors' shows, and are named world champions in the face of fierce competition. We firmly believe that by bolstering R&D, encouraging innovation, cultivating the manufacture of domestically designed products, and protecting intellectual property rights, Taiwan will have established exceedingly favorable conditions for becoming a global innovation center and a cradle for the world's top brands.

In the next century, the ROC will become a nation the world will respect and an inspiration to many. Forbearing governance and benevolent rule are the essence of Chinese culture. It is in such a "nonpredatory yet progressive" spirit that we will proactively show concern for global issues and participate in international affairs.

Ours is an expansive, outward-looking culture that takes the seven seas as its home base and the globe as the cradle of its civilization. As a member of the international community, the ROC is more than willing to take on its responsibilities and make contributions commensurate with our ability. We are determined to be a peacemaker, a provider of humanitarian aid, a promoter of cultural ties, and a creator of new technologies and business opportunities. We want to make the ROC a nation that is both respected by and inspiring to people around the world.

Conclusion

My fellow compatriots: As we celebrate the ROC's hundred years of history, let us recall that the ROC of today has come about thanks to generations of people who, concerned about their nation's future, devoted their youth and ideals to the nation's construction and social reform.

As we begin a new century, I am reminded of the words of Jiang Wei-shui, a towering figure in

Taiwan's history, who said more than 80 years ago: "Compatriots must unite, for in unity there is great strength." We must support and encourage each other, because the nation's prospects and Taiwan's future are in the hands of our 23 million people. We decide matters for ourselves. We must steadfastly defend the ROC's sovereignty and work to protect Taiwan's dignity. With wisdom, let us create a brighter future for Taiwan and another prosperous century.

Please stand with me as together we chant:

Long live the Republic of China!

Long live democracy in Taiwan!