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FAPA Commemorates Taiwan’s Freedom of Speech Day, Urging Vigilance to Defend its Hard-Earned Democracy

The Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) joins Taiwanese communities worldwide in commemorating **Freedom of Speech Day** on April 7, honoring the legacy of **democracy activist Cheng Nan-jung, also known as “Nylon” (鄭南榕)**. Cheng self-immolated on that day in 1989 to protest the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) regime’s attempt to arrest him on sedition charges.

After founding *The Freedom Era Weekly* in 1984, Cheng declared the publication was “**fighting for 100 percent freedom of speech.**” As the magazine’s founder and editor-in-chief, **he advocated for Taiwan independence, democratic reform, freedom of expression, and the Taiwanese people’s right to self-determination.** The magazine frequently published pro-democracy and pro-independence content. After publishing Hsu Shih-kai’s (許世楷) “**Draft Constitution of the Taiwan Republic**” in 1988, Cheng was charged with sedition.

He refused to comply with the summons and arrest warrant in defense of freedom of speech. After a 71-day standoff with authorities, he ultimately self-immolated on April 7, 1989, as a testament to his resolve. During his self-confinement, Cheng gave an interview entitled “**Independence is the only way out for Taiwan,**” declaring, “**The KMT will only take my body; they will never take me alive.**” His sacrifice has since become **a powerful symbol of Taiwan’s pursuit of independence, liberty, democracy, and human rights.**

“**Cheng Nan-jung’s unwavering commitment to freedom of expression and Taiwan independence continues to inspire generations of activists in Taiwan and around the world,**” said FAPA National President Dr. Su-Mei Kao (林素梅). “His sacrifice in 1989 reminds us that **the freedoms and democracy that the Taiwanese people enjoy today were hard-won through the courage, determination, and sacrifices of countless predecessors.**”

“**Taiwan’s democratic transition was driven by decades of struggle and advocacy at home and abroad,**” Dr. Kao added. “In the United States, **Taiwanese American activists founded FAPA in 1982, many of whom had been ‘blacklisted’ by the KMT regime and barred from returning to Taiwan.** During the organization’s early years, **FAPA worked intensively with bipartisan leaders in Congress** — including Senators Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and Representatives Stephen Solarz (D-NY) and Jim Leach (R-IA) — **to advance Taiwan’s democracy and human rights.**

FAPA’s notable early advocacy efforts and achievements for Taiwan’s democratization include:

- A House resolution **calling on the Taiwan authorities to lift martial law (H.Res.591, 1982).**



- A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress concerning **the need to achieve full democracy on Taiwan** ([H.Con.Res.344, 1984](#)).
- A foreign relations authorization law whose **Section 806, titled “Democracy on Taiwan,”** explicitly expressed Congressional support for **democratic development and human rights in Taiwan** ([H.R.2068 / Public Law 99-93, Section 806, 1985](#)).
- Concurrent resolutions expressing Congressional support for **Taiwan’s continued democratization**, urging the Taiwan authorities to **allow the formation of opposition political parties**, to **guarantee freedom of speech, expression, and assembly**, and to **move toward a full representative government**, including **free legislative and presidential elections** ([H.Con.Res.233, 1985](#), and [S.Con.Res.121, 1986](#)).
- A concurrent resolution to express the sense of Congress regarding **democratic reforms and human rights in Taiwan** ([H.Con.Res.235, 1989](#)).
- A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that **the authorities on Taiwan should permit the return to Taiwan of all citizens of Taiwan who are committed to peaceful political change** ([H.Con.Res.248, 1991](#)).

“As Taiwan has transformed into a thriving democratic and independent country, FAPA’s mission has also evolved,” Dr. Kao concluded. “From advocating for democratization, **we must now safeguard Taiwan’s hard-earned democracy and consolidate its independent statehood** against growing threats and infiltration from China. **Democracy and independence are not destinations, but continuous commitments that must be actively protected.**”

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