

Minister Francisco H.L. Ou from the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives a lecture at National Cheng Kung University

News

Mr. Francisco H.L. Ou, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a guest speaker at National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) on May 15th, 2009. His lecture entitled "Current Diplomatic Policies and Issues of Taiwan," was hosted by Dr. Michael M.C. Lai, President of NCKU.

The lecture attracted a full house, including Prof. Woei-Shyan Lee, Secretary General of NCKU, Prof. Yonhua Tzeng, NCKU Vice President for R&D, and other NCKU faculty and students interested in Taiwanese diplomatic issues.



President Lai said that Taiwanese higher education lacks the spirit of globalization that is also a crucial goal for Taiwanese universities to pursue with an aim to become the top-tier world renowned universities. President Lai also believed that the connotation of globalization involves abilities to communicate with foreigners, acquire knowledge on current diplomatic issues, and having globalization perspectives.

In his lecture, Minister Ou analyzed the current international outlook in detail. He explained that in recent years, due to skyrocketing energy price-hike, the world market is severely hurt with the doubling of transportation costs. As a result, global manufacturing chains have become more regional in nature. Taiwan, a key air transportation hub for Southeast Asia, enjoys a geographical advantage.

Minister Ou asked whether Taiwan can leverage its industrial strengths, take advantage of liberalized cross-strait policies and actively integrate itself into the Asia-Pacific economy. He thinks the result is critical to Taiwan's economic and trade development.

Minister Ou explained to the audience that mainland China has enjoyed rapid economic growth, allowing it to enhance its political and military power significantly. The international community therefore hopes that one day China will assume the role of a "responsible stakeholder". He recommends China to integrate itself into the free market, join the ranks of democratic countries, respect international norms and maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

He mentioned that the international community is sincerely concerned over stability in the Taiwan Strait. Minister Ou stressed that many issues require multinational coordination to obtain effective solutions, including global warming, the US and global financial crisis, financial liberalization, counter-terrorism, drug prevention, illegal foreign labor and immigration, humanitarian aid, disease prevention, as well as trade and fisheries. Essentially, Taiwan has a pressing need to enter functional and specialized

international organizations and expand its role in multilateral cooperation.

To meet the challenges stemming from regional economic integration, the rise of China and other international developments, Minister Ou stated that Taiwan needs to formulate innovative diplomatic policies in order to turn trends to its advantage. This will help minimize the threat from China, and protect its national interests. By doing so, Taiwan can amass greater bargaining power with which to expand its room to maneuver internationally.

The so-called "flexible diplomacy", which President Ma Ying-jeou's administration is promoting through the adoption of diplomatic policies, upholds principles of dignity, autonomy, pragmatism and agility.

Minister Ou argues that China's long-term suppression remains the crux of Taiwan's diplomatic problems. Therefore, for the "flexible diplomacy" to succeed, Taiwan needs to improve its relations with mainland China. Both sides should start by discussing issues of common interest so that mutual trust can be fostered over time. This would let Taiwan and China set aside past disputes, which would benefit their respective bilateral relations and aid in Taiwan's participation in international organizations. He thinks that the international community would welcome peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and the "flexible diplomacy" would serve in the best interest of and provide a win-win solution for Taiwan, mainland China and other members of the international community. The "flexible diplomacy" policy consists of two elements, diplomatic truce and proactive diplomacy.

Minister Ou explained that the call for diplomatic truce aims to end counterproductive competitions between both sides of the Taiwan Strait so that they can pursue coexistence and co-prosperity in the international arena. During diplomatic truce period, conducts that are detrimental or harmful to the national interests of Taiwan should be discontinued.

Minister Ou believed that diplomatic truce is conducive to peace and prosperity in the Taiwan Strait, which is the goal for both Taiwan and China. In the end, Taiwan and mainland China can create a win-win situation for both of them in the international community.

In terms of proactive diplomacy, Minister Ou explained that Taiwan's diplomatic efforts must be infused with professionalism. Taiwan is refocusing its resources to strengthen relations with its diplomatic allies, upgrade the level of contact with major countries in each region and integrate itself into the Asia-Pacific regional economy. Meanwhil, Taiwan hopes to expand its participation in functional and specialized international organizations. In addition, it strives to create a climate that benefits its economic development, while combining forces with the private sector to promote exchange and interaction with other civil societies globally.

Minister Ou believed, in the current international situation, "flexible diplomacy" is the most feasible and effective approach for Taiwanese foreign-relations policy, in which Taiwan would neither belittle itself nor abandon its national sovereignty. Instead, Taiwan strives to shape the international climate to expand its diplomatic efforts. The push for "flexible diplomacy" is a constant and incremental process in which Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) resolves some of the most important issues: securing greater support from the international community and acquiring positive response from mainland China to Taiwan's pursuit of increased international stance.

Minister Ou also propagated the achievement of MOFA through its extensive efforts to consolidate diplomatic ties in promotion of flexible diplomacy. According to Minister Ou, Taiwan has enjoyed a long-

standing and friendly relations with its sole diplomatic ally in Europe, the Holy See.

As for relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, Taiwan remains extremely close to its 12 diplomatic allies in these regions. In addition, the relations between Taiwan and its six allies in the South Pacific remain stable. The heads of state of these six countries reiterated their staunch support of Taiwan's bid to participate in the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO). As for diplomatic work in Africa, Taiwan and its four allies in the continent are reviewing previous or existing cooperative projects and planning new ones through regular consultations, thereby further promoting bilateral ties.

Minister Ou also mentioned that Taiwan's foreign policy on strengthening substantial relations with non-allies is still intact. MOFA has dedicated to the re-building of mutual trust between Taiwan and the United States by actively strengthening its communication with the US government, various think tanks as well as the Congress.

With respect to Taiwan-Japan relations, Japan has granted visa-free entrance to Taiwanese tourists, and the two countries have recognized the driver's licenses of each other. Strengthening and enhancing relations with Japan is vital to Taiwan's foreign policy goals. He knows that the Taiwanese administration considers that Taiwan and Japan enjoy a "special partnership".

By reiterating the importance of expanding multilateral relations, Minister Ou stressed there are two goals: participating in economic organizations and events in the Asia Pacific region, and expanding participation in professional and specialized international organizations.

He said that as Taiwan and ASEAN countries are geographically close, we share many common interests. As such, MOFA has established an ASEAN Taskforce to be in charge of planning work related to ASEAN. As decision-making in ASEAN is by consensus, MOFA will begin by enhancing bilateral relations with individual ASEAN member countries. In addition, he promised that Taiwan will gradually take part in ASEAN regional events through signing agreements, initiating industrial cooperation and joining the strategic alliance.

Minister Ou argued that Taiwan currently participates in 48 intergovernmental organizations, and MOFA's work at this stage is focused on maintaining Taiwanese memberships and rights. Taiwan continues to enthusiastically participate in international organizations such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Vegetable Center (AVRDC), the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and its Government Advisory Committee (GAC), as well as the Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA). These platforms provide an effective channel for establishing cooperative mechanisms with other international organizations and countries friendly to Taiwan.

In conclusion, Minister Ou stressed future prospects of Taiwanese foreign policies on raising the level of professionalism and improving Taiwan's foreign aid policy. In addition, he also focused on fostering soft-power diplomacy, which can increase our connections in the international community and enhance our image.

According to Minister Ou, recently the government has made great efforts in integrating nongovernmental groups to promote soft-power diplomacy. For instance, the government supports

domestic NGOs with their international humanitarian aid efforts, assists with the development of ecotourism in Taiwan's diplomatic allies, encourages certain NGOs to hold international conferences in Taiwan, and works with the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy to present the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award. On top of that, the government also sponsors the establishment of Taiwan Academies overseas, and provides Taiwan Scholarships to encourage outstanding foreign students to come to study in Taiwan.

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