

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Canada Must Support Taiwan's WHO Bid

Ottawa, Ontario – The Formosan Association for Public Affairs, Canada call on the Canadian government to fully support Taiwan's bid for entry to the World Health Organization. As Canadians, we value human rights, health, and inclusion. The Canadian government must respect these values as it sends its delegation to the World Health Assembly on May 22. The rights of all citizens to proper health and the right of Taiwan to have access to global health resources trump the political objections that China has.

If the Canadian government is serious about combating the spread of epidemics, it must realize that such diseases do not respect national borders. For the sake of the international community and the fight against disease outbreaks, Canada must ensure that Taiwan is fully incorporated in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network as well as the International Health Regulation mechanism.

Finally, it is in Canada's own interests to support Taiwan's admittance to the WHO. As bilateral trade flourishes between these two nations, and as Canada promotes economic, cultural and commercial ties with Taiwan, Canada simply cannot afford to have Taiwan excluded from the WHO. We call on Prime Minister Harper, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, and the Canadian delegation to the World Health Assembly to whole-heartedly support Taiwan's bid for entry into the World Health Organization.

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Background Information

The constitution of the World Health Organization states: “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being. The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and states.”

Unfortunately, the WHO contradicts its own constitution by excluding Taiwan from membership. Taiwan is excluded from the WHO ranks, solely because of political objections from China. However, it is important to realize that the issue of Taiwan’s bid for WHO entry is a question of fundamental rights; it is not a political issue.

Taiwan’s exclusion from the WHO denies it crucial resources. When epidemics occur, the WHO does not share information with Taiwan because Taiwan is not allowed to participate in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. This was evident during the 1998 enterovirus epidemic that spread from Malaysia, and it was evident during the September 21, 1999 earthquake on Taiwan. But most strikingly, when Taiwan promptly reported its first SARS case in 2003, its requests for WHO assistance were delayed by seven weeks. Taiwan is willing to fully cooperate with the WHO, which is more than we can say for China, which covered up the severity of its outbreak, despite being a full-fledged member.

Such exclusion is dangerous and nonsensical in an age of increasing globalization. Taiwan is a large trading nation, and fully integrated into the world economy. Bilateral trade between Canada and Taiwan is \$5-billion annually, and there are 150,000 Taiwanese-Canadians living in Canada, many of whom travel back and forth frequently. Taiwan is a major transportation hub in East Asia, and a transit point for many migratory birds. A virus that originates in China can spread to Taiwan and then to Vancouver in less than a 24 hour time period. Canada cannot afford to have Taiwan outside the scope of international response mechanisms for diseases and pandemics. The cost is too high.

Indeed, democratically elected representatives of Canada passed a motion on May 27, 2003 to support Taiwan’s inclusion into the WHO. Proponents of this motion included then opposition leader Stephen Harper who is the current Prime Minister.

Canada’s Foreign Affairs Ministry has said that “it would support a formula for Taiwan’s representation at the WHA provided it is in accordance with the WHO’s constitutional rules and procedures and has received broad-based approval of the WHO membership.” Frankly, we believe this statement is rather weak, and relegates Canada to being a follower than a leader. Taiwan’s inclusion is not a matter of broad-based approval; it is a matter of the health and rights of 23 million Taiwanese citizens. Canada should take a strong leadership position and fully support Taiwan’s bid because it is in Canada’s interests and it is the right thing to do.

The inclusion of Taiwan into the WHO is necessary. It grants the fundamental right of health to the Taiwanese people, it brings Taiwan into the global health community, to be a part of international outbreak response to epidemics and diseases, and it ensures that the world community does not have to worry about a region that cannot access WHO resources.