

Humanitarianism and Disease Prevention Must Both be taken into Account: Cross-Strait Cooperation Required in Evacuation

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The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) solemnly clarified the false statement made by Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson on February 6 evening, saying that "follow-up transportation arrangements have been constantly obstructed by the Taiwan authorities." MAC also expressed regret over the Mainland's repeated unilateral statements, which serve no purpose in bettering communication and cooperation between the two sides.

Out of the first group of Taiwanese passengers evacuated on February 3, three showed signs of fever and one tested positive for coronavirus, clearly demonstrating China's failure in implementing comprehensive disease prevention measures. This creates a breach in epidemic control and risk of cross-infection among passengers on the flight. It could have serious and unimaginable consequences if others on board were infected. It also runs counter to the consensus reached between the two sides to prioritize epidemic prevention.

The prevention of such a severe epidemic is no child's play. Protection measures of the highest safety standards must be duly and carefully implemented to prevent risks involved in the evacuation. The transportation and reception of evacuees cannot be handled rashly or impulsively. Both sides need to strengthen relevant preparation, coordination, and cooperation. An evacuation proposal including a mere list of names with a requested transportation date set within such a short timeframe cannot ensure full disease prevention. Such is a hasty and sloppy approach that inevitably increases risks of epidemic spread

and poses significant hazards in disease prevention.

Taiwan informed the Mainland early on, that priority must first be given to those on short business travels to Wuhan, those with chronic diseases or with long-term special prescription or frequent medical care demands (i.e. serious conditions including hemophilia), and those with comparatively lower immunity, such as the young and elderly; a relevant list of such cases was provided to the Mainland. However, the final evacuation list did not grant priority to the abovementioned individuals, reflecting the Mainland's inability to prioritize humanitarian principles.

The MAC stated that disease prevention demands a high degree of professionalism; it is a fight against an unseen enemy, requiring anticipation and preparation for the worst case scenarios. Taiwan and the Mainland should communicate and cooperate responsibly and prudently to allow the orderly and safe return of stranded Taiwanese people. Taiwan therefore reiterates that the two sides should communicate and agree on the following so as to ensure feasibility of future evacuations plans: quarantine reliability must be improved, the vulnerable must be prioritized in accordance to humanitarian principles, and Taiwan's isolation ward capacity must be taken into consideration.

Relations across the Strait is of unique nature; it is hoped that the Mainland can put aside political thinking, promptly return to a humanitarian position, and thoroughly implement disease prevention and risk controls to allow successful evacuation to Taiwan as soon as possible.