

Minister Chiu's March 18 Remarks to the Press

Mainland Affairs Council

March 18, 2021

Friends in the Media, Good day!

I am delighted to have this opportunity to share with you my observations on cross-Strait relations since taking office, and brief you on related work and measures that will be carried out by the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) in the future.

As you all know, the current situation in the world and the Asia-Pacific region is rapidly changing. The newly-elected US administration has recently initiated diplomatic work on uniting allies in response to the challenge posted by a rising China; it has also emphasized the importance of democracy, human rights, and international norms. We welcome this and believe that the competitive landscape of US-China relations will remain unchanged on the long run. Last week, mainland China had just concluded the "Two Sessions," during which time it set China's medium- and long-term economic and social development goals and publicized its policy course for self-governance. Regrettably, however, we also see the overhaul of Hong Kong's legal and political structures. Such a move not only indicates mainland China's broken pledge of "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong, it also underscores the obstinacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as it tries to consolidate its authoritarian regime and to continue to curb the democratic development in mainland China and Hong Kong. All of this has an impact on cross-Strait relations.

The CCP's consistent Taiwan policy of "opposing independence and promoting unification" and its coercive mindset and practices employed when dealing with the external world have not only continued to foster an enabling

environment for its subsequent shaping of political agenda, but prompted an ongoing and heated discussion among numerous international think tanks over the implication of future cross-strait conflicts. The Tsai administration's primary objective of promoting cross-Strait relations is to strive for "peace and stability" by building a national security and defense system and avoiding conflict. I believe that the two sides across the Taiwan Strait can engage in friendlier and more benign interaction and cooperation, without having to force ourselves or the other side to walk into a set framework. Over the past five years, this administration has devoted to maintaining the status quo of cross-Strait peace and stability, defending national sovereignty and democracy, and "not yielding under pressure, nor engaging in rash behavior upon external support." This policy not only aligns with the common interests of both sides across the Taiwan Strait, but has been affirmed by the people of Taiwan and the international community.

As I have mentioned it before, we hold no ill intention against mainland China. All policies and measures are meant for enhancing cross-Strait understanding, mutual benefit, and reciprocity. I have also said that cross-Strait exchanges are bound to resume in the post-pandemic era. The government has already relaxed entry requirements on March 1 for foreign citizens to enter Taiwan. Therefore, in line with ongoing adjustments to border controls by Taiwan's Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), related measures that are currently under discussion or carried out by the MAC are as follows.

1. Resuming exchanges in a “phased” and orderly manner based on scientific indicators of the epidemic and development of cross-Strait situations. The MAC and the CECC will, step by step, resume healthy and orderly cross-Strait exchanges between the two sides across the Taiwan Strait based on objective indicators and assessment from the WHO, the latest pandemic situation in countries worldwide, including mainland China, and our domestic pandemic prevention capabilities and the overall development of cross-Strait relations.

2. Resuming applications for mainland Chinese citizens to enter Taiwan for performance of contractual obligation in business or internal personnel transfer within multinational enterprises. In order to invigorate cross-Strait economic activity, the MAC had suggested to assess the possibilities of opening borders for mainland Chinese citizens to enter Taiwan for performance of contractual obligation in business or internal personnel transfer within multinational enterprises. The President and the Premier then gave directives for the CECC to discuss the matter with relevant agencies. After a thorough feasibility review, the application channel is now open starting from today (for detailed application process, please refer to the National Immigration Agency website). Moreover, the MAC, in conjunction with the CECC and relevant agencies, will assess the resumption of humanitarian family visits from mainland China and other cross-strait person-to-person exchanges, as well as other future border control adjustments. In addition, the MAC is also currently reviewing the comprehensiveness of exchange-related regulations and supporting measures to protect people's rights and interests, the order of exchanges, and national security.

3. Ensuring the health and safety of people on both sides across the Taiwan Strait through mechanisms under cross-Strait agreements. The two sides across the Taiwan Strait should proactively implement established agreements and, through the established mechanisms, communicate and handle issues pertaining to people's health and safety, such as disease prevention, health, and quarantine and inspection of agricultural products.

At this stage, maintaining "peace, stability, and development" is arguably the greatest common denominator between the two sides across the Taiwan Strait. So allow me here to make three appeals to the other side.

First, I call on mainland China to fully understand the differences in the systems and values between the two sides across the Taiwan Strait to avoid negative interpretations or misjudgments; to put aside the political framework and confronting measures it has been imposing on Taiwan, in particular, by stopping its military threats around the Taiwan Strait; and to view the development of cross-Strait relations in a positive light.

Second, the two sides across the Taiwan Strait should resolve problems with mutual respect and through pragmatic dialogue. When President Tsai took office in 2016, she said that cross-Strait dialogue and communication would continue through the existing mechanisms. She also said she would respect the historical fact that in 1992, the two institutions representing each side across the Taiwan Strait, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), arrived at various joint acknowledgements and understandings through communications and dialogue and in a spirit of seeking common ground while setting aside differences. Taiwan's cross-Strait policy stance has been consistent and unchanged: both sides should continue to promote the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations based on this existing fact and political foundation.

My third appeal is for the two sides across the Taiwan Strait to make equivalent efforts for resuming exchanges. "Exchanges are a two-way street." Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Taiwan and mainland China have both adopted control measures. In the future, on the foundation of maintaining people's health and well-being and benign interaction between the two sides, mainland China should also make corresponding adjustments and responses, and renounce the unilateral restrictions it imposed earlier. I believe that, through the joint efforts of both sides, the post-pandemic "reopening" will surely usher in a "new spring" for the two sides across the Taiwan Strait. Thank you!