

Clarification of operational adjustments at TECO in Hong Kong

News Reference Material

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1. Rationale for adjustments

1.1. The government of Hong Kong has violated its agreement with Taiwan by demanding that Taiwanese personnel at TECO in Hong Kong sign a pledge to observe the “one China principle.”

In July 2018, the government of Hong Kong demanded that the Director General-designate of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Hong Kong (TECO) sign a pledge to observe the “one China principle” as a precondition for issuing him a visa. Taiwan categorically rejected this demand. However, the Hong Kong government remained adamant, and in July 2020 the directors of three TECO divisions applying for visa extensions and a newly appointed secretary applying for a visa met with a similar demand that they provide a written commitment to the “one China principle.” In March and April 2021, the Hong Kong government extended its unreasonable demand to private-sector groups (such as the Taiwan External Trade Development Council) and agencies that are not part of the TECO organization (such as the Tourism Bureau); two director-level staff members who refused to sign a pledge to observe the “one China principle” were ordered to leave Hong Kong by a specific date. In June 2021, six Taiwanese staff members serving at TECO—the deputy directors of two divisions and four secretaries—were confronted with the same demand to sign pledges on the “one China principle” when they applied for visa extensions.

1.2. Taiwan refuses to accept any political preconditions that would

downgrade its national status.

The Hong Kong government's demand that pledges be made to observe the "one China principle" serves as a political obstacle aimed at downgrading Taiwan's national status and forcing TECO personnel to yield to the Beijing authorities. Taiwan firmly refuses to accept this. However, giving due consideration to the rights and interests of the people of Taiwan and Hong Kong, it has nonetheless continued to communicate with the Hong Kong government. Regrettably, Taiwan has not received a positive response in return, making it untenable for TECO personnel to remain in Hong Kong or travel there to assume their duties. Given these developments, Taiwan has formulated a contingency plan to introduce operational adjustments at TECO starting from June 21, maintaining essential operations in an effort to provide services to the public.

2. Taiwan's position

2.1. As the mutual establishment of offices between Taiwan and Hong Kong was based on the principle of reciprocity, Taiwan cannot accept Hong Kong's unilateral imposition of political preconditions that downgrade Taiwan's national status.

In accordance with the exchange of letters between Taiwan and Hong Kong regarding the mutual establishment of offices in 2011, the two parties set up offices under the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit, with Taiwan's office being renamed the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. The letters also included details regarding the offices' operations and functions, personnel structure, and the arrangement of privileges. However, they did not include an agreement allowing for the addition of any political preconditions. Even so, the Hong Kong government is now insisting on receiving a written commitment to the "one China principle,"

which downgrades Taiwan's national status, as a precondition for issuing visas to personnel posted to TECO. The government of Taiwan absolutely will not accept this unilateral violation of the content of the 2011 exchange of letters, nor will the vast majority of people in Taiwan agree to this unreasonable requirement that contravenes the accord reached between Taiwan and Hong Kong.

2.2. The unreasonable action taken by the Hong Kong government under the control of the People's Republic of China again proves that the "one country, two systems" framework exists in name only; the Hong Kong government's unilateral violation of an agreement constitutes a black mark that should be of grave concern to the international community.

Indisputably, the PRC is the hidden hand behind the Hong Kong government's attempts to deny visas to TECO personnel. The PRC seeks to use TECO as a tool to advance its political agenda against Taiwan. It has already been criticized by the international community for its failure to honor the Sino-British Joint Declaration and for disrupting Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy. Yet today, the Hong Kong government is coordinating with the PRC to pressure Taiwan, not only proving again that Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" framework exists in name only, but also raising questions about the autonomy and integrity of the Hong Kong government among countries that have signed accords or concluded protocols with it.

2.3. With their every action based on political calculations, the PRC and Hong Kong governments are the culprits behind the disruption of Taiwan-Hong Kong ties and are fully responsible for the negative impact on people's rights and interests.

Taiwan has always upheld the principle of reciprocity and given due consideration to people's welfare in striving to promote its relations

with Hong Kong. Since its establishment, TECO has consistently provided services to the public and conducted all of its activities in accordance with the law, never stepping beyond the scope of its operations and functions. Meanwhile, the PRC and Hong Kong have imposed restrictions on the office's activities and condoned disinformation and smear campaigns by pro-China media, creating serious disruptions to Taiwan-Hong Kong ties. They are fully responsible for the negative impact on people's rights and interests.

2.4. We hope that the Taiwanese people and international community will be vigilant and stand firmly together to form a line of defense for democracy in Asia.

The PRC and Hong Kong governments have made their political schemes all too clear. Taiwan stands firm in refusing to compromise in order to prevent TECO from becoming a point of breakthrough for "one China," which, in turn, could pose a threat to Taiwan's democracy and freedom or even produce a chain reaction that might have a ripple effect on regional security. The government of Taiwan will staunchly protect its national dignity. It strongly condemns and cautions the PRC and Hong Kong governments while calling on the Taiwanese people to unite in solidarity and continue to safeguard our national sovereignty, democracy, and freedom. We also urge the international community to support Taiwan and join us in our efforts to secure a line of defense for democracy in Asia.

2.5. Support for democracy and freedom for the people of Hong Kong should not serve as an excuse for putting political pressure on Taiwan.

Based on the spirit of its Constitution and in line with universal values, Taiwan, like major democracies, supports the Hong Kong people's pursuit of democracy and freedom. Moreover, in accordance with the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong &

Macao, Taiwan provides humanitarian support and essential services to Hong Kong people who have entered Taiwan legally and have certain basic needs. We reiterate that our support for the Hong Kong people's pursuit of freedom and human rights is born of an obligation shared by all democratic nations. Furthermore, we have never interfered in the internal affairs of Hong Kong. Even if the PRC and Hong Kong governments are unwilling to face the Hong Kong people's appeal for democracy, universal suffrage, freedom, and human rights, they should not use this as an excuse for retaliation against Taiwan.

2.6. TECO will uphold its duty to serve the public, with full support from related ministries and agencies.

Despite the serious situation in Hong Kong, we, as a responsible government, remain committed to providing services to the public. Following adjustments to the scope and format of operations at TECO, related ministries and agencies will provide full support to jointly protect the rights and interests of the Taiwanese and Hong Kong people. In addition, we solemnly inform related parties that Taiwan will respond with necessary measures should any further actions be taken that are detrimental to TECO's rights and interests. We also ask that related parties in no way ignore Taiwan's determination to safeguard its national sovereignty, democracy, and freedom.

3. Future operations

In response to TECO personnel being obstructed from assuming their posts in Hong Kong, a number of adjustments will be made to the operations of the office. To ensure that services continue uninterrupted, the location and phone number of the office will remain unchanged. The following adjustments will be made to the main operations of TECO

(further details will be announced by related authorities):

- 3.1. Consular affairs:** TECO will continue to accept and fulfill applications regarding the replacement and renewal of R.O.C. (Taiwan) passports, the provision and authentication of documents, the processing of visa applications for foreign nationals, and other affairs.
- 3.2. Hong Kong residents visiting or relocating to Taiwan; mainland Chinese in Hong Kong entering Taiwan:** In principle, the process for Hong Kong residents applying to visit or relocate to Taiwan will not be changed. Hong Kong residents applying to visit Taiwan may do so online through related cloud systems; those seeking to relocate to Taiwan must have their applications processed in person. Mainland Chinese applying to visit Taiwan may do so online through related cloud systems; those seeking to reunite with their family or register a marriage must undergo an online border interview.
- 3.3. Emergency assistance for Taiwanese nationals and liaison services for Taiwanese business or compatriot associations will continue to be handled by TECO.**
- 3.4. Economic and trade affairs:** The collection of economic and trade information, trade promotion, and other services will continue to be provided.
- 3.5. Cultural exchange and promotion:** In the future, TECO will commission or subsidize specialist Taiwanese curatorial units and arts administration teams to organize arts and cultural events in Hong Kong and Macao, and continue to assist Taiwanese artists and groups in performing or holding exhibitions in local institutes or at local arts events.
- 3.6. Admissions of Hong Kong students and services for Taiwanese students in Hong Kong:** TECO will continue to oversee the University Entrance Committee for Overseas Chinese Students in

optimizing the overall admissions process, streamlining admission procedures, establishing cloud/online application systems, and launching a consultation hotline for Hong Kong student admissions. The Ministry of Education is also setting up a hotline for Taiwanese students in Hong Kong so as to maintain the provision of consultation services.

3.7. Tourism promotion and operations: Current operations will be maintained, with the Taiwan Visitors Association promoting tourism-related affairs.

3.8. Taiwan-Hong Kong financial cooperation and the implementation of existing agreements will continue.

4. Conclusion

Taiwan will neither compromise nor make concessions in safeguarding national sovereignty. Unreasonable political pressure from the PRC and Hong Kong governments coercing TECO personnel into a written commitment to the “one China principle” will be rejected. Who is responsible for worsening Taiwan-Hong Kong relations? Who is helping people and who is harming people? People from all sectors can see for themselves. Despite being faced with an extremely difficult and inimical situation, TECO will hold fast to its promise to serve the people and make adjustments that allow it to continue doing so. We hope that the Taiwanese people will accommodate these changes in an understanding way and that they will continue to be the strongest and most effective guardians of our national dignity.