

Follow-up Explanation on Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Individuals Coming to Taiwan for Today's "Fo Guang Shan Memorial Ceremony for Master Hsing Yun"

News Reference Material

Date: February 13, 2023

The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) issued the following statement in regards to the "Memorial Ceremony for Master Hsing Yun" held by Fo Guang Shan this morning (February 13, 2023). The MAC said that by last Friday (February 10), the competent government agencies had already completed work on issuing entry/exit permits for 124 individuals, including Master Hsing Yun's relatives and friends in mainland China and Hong Kong, delegations from Buddhist temples, followers, and religious figures. A total of 91 mainland Chinese and Hong Kong individuals successfully made it to Taiwan for the ceremony. The government is pleased that the ceremony was solemnly and successfully completed and that individuals from mainland China, Hong Kong, and other parts of the world could join the people of Taiwan in remembering Master Hsing Yun and his legacy. Our government has fully achieved our policy objective of promoting cross-Strait religious exchanges through coordinating work on issuing entry permits to Taiwan for the invitees of Fo Guang Shan.

Master Hsing Yun passed away on February 5, and the MAC immediately started coordinating work on issuing entry permits for relevant mainland Chinese and Hong Kong individuals within the timeline of Fo Guang Shan's preparation for the ceremony. In an ad hoc meeting jointly held by the MAC and competent government agencies on February 8, it was decided that due to the tight schedule, the application of entry permits would be processed in the most lenient and fastest way within the scope of current regulations to ensure that relevant individuals could come to Taiwan for the ceremony on time. With the full cooperation of various

agencies, the entry/exit permits for 124 mainland Chinese and Hong Kong individuals were expedited and issued within three days without delay.

Considering that at the moment, entry applications of mainland Chinese individuals intended to come to Taiwan for religious exchanges still need to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, for the sake of efficiency in this instance, the MAC and the competent government agencies jointly adopted the following adjustments to our review process. (1) Flexible adjustments to the review procedure: The invitation list received from Fo Guang Shan was first provided to the Central Epidemic Command Center for review. Later, when Fo Guang Shan followed up with the application documents of each invitee, each application was processed immediately by the competent government agencies in a “once come, immediately serve” manner to accelerate the administrative process. (2) Alternative review procedure for those in more sensitive capacities, such as members of mainland China's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, members of mainland China's National People's Congress, or the former chairperson of Hong Kong's Phoenix TV: the ordinary procedure requires the competent government agencies to meet another day for review, but given the timeline of this ceremony, the MAC coordinated with various agencies to conduct immediate reviews online before granting case-by-case approvals.

The MAC emphasized that the government welcomes mainland Chinese individuals, including those in official capacities, to come to Taiwan for this particular memorial ceremony. However, the mainland Chinese authorities should still have respected the communication and liaison mechanism established by the two sides in the past to facilitate the working-level cross-Strait people-to-people exchanges by communicating and coordinating with our government in advance. Unfortunately, mainland China's Taiwan Affairs Office refused to go through this liaison mechanism to communicate with the MAC in advance, which prevented our government from processing the entry applications of the 12 persons in official capacities in accordance with the relevant procedures. Moreover, mainland China even demanded that the 24 religious persons who had been issued entry permits

not come to Taiwan under the pretext that everyone had to "enter and exit as a group." The MAC regrets that mainland China used the memorial ceremony for Master Hsing Yun, a figure venerated by people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, for deliberate political manipulation. This is unacceptable to the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

The MAC reiterated that fostering benign and positive cross-Strait relations is the shared responsibility of both sides across the Taiwan Strait. Our government welcomes mainland Chinese individuals, including those in official capacities, to visit Taiwan for exchanges as it is our established policy to promote healthy and orderly post-pandemic cross-Strait exchanges. We hope that mainland China can respect the existing liaison and communication mechanism established between the two sides for people-to-people exchanges and promote cross-Strait exchanges with a pragmatic and open-minded attitude. Only through these initiatives will the two sides be able to gradually build mutual trust and enable the benign development of cross-Strait relations.