

Connection Not Necessary Between Individual Cases of Tourist Accidents in Mainland China Involving Taiwanese Citizens and the Issue of Resuming Cross-Strait Group Travel

MAC Press Release No. 043

The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) issued the following clarification with regard to the reports published today (October 29, 2023) by the United Daily News, titled "Taiwan Tour Groups to Mainland China Risking Gray Area Practices due to Ongoing Group Travel Ban" and "Exchanges Hindered by Politics: How Economy and Safety Become Collateral Damage." These articles deliberately overlook the active efforts by all parties across the Taiwan Strait through existing mechanisms to provide assistance in the Xinjiang accident; moreover, they disregard the root causes currently impeding bilateral tourism exchanges across the Taiwan Strait.

Cross-Strait travel by people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait has been a long-standing activity. In cases of tourist accidents in mainland China involving Taiwanese citizens, the government had always ensured to provide its citizens with necessary assistance through established cross-Strait mechanisms. The MAC stated that, in the recent Xinjiang accident involving Taiwanese travelers, the government promptly cooperated with the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and relevant industry parties in Taiwan to jointly provide assistance. The incident was handled with the same procedures and same level of efficiency as before the COVID-19 pandemic and without any delay. The media's comments about "sacrificing travel safety" are entirely at odds with the facts.

The MAC emphasized that the Xinjiang accident was purely a travel incident, and there is no need to force a connection between this case and whether the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have resumed group travel. On the issue of restoring cross-Strait group travel, the government's attitude and policy are clear: on September 23, it had already completed preparations to resume bilateral

exchanges, and two-way group travel across the Taiwan Strait can proceed once mainland China gives the nod.

The MAC stated that Taiwan's tourism industry serves not only domestic travelers but also outbound and inbound visitors. In the context of cross-Strait tourism, the "two-way, reciprocal opening" approach that Taiwan advocates for is the result of meeting the demand of the domestic tourism industry while perfecting policy arrangements. Both the tourism industry and media outlets in Taiwan have commented that the current number of outbound travelers from Taiwan far surpasses the number of inbound visitors to Taiwan, based on which they advised the government to strive to balance the interests of all stakeholders in the tourism industry.

In contrast to Taiwan's proposal for a "two-way reciprocal opening," mainland China has only shown interest in "one-way opening." It has only been emphasizing its political views while neglecting responsibility for the safety of Taiwanese tourists traveling there. The MAC calls upon all parties in Taiwan to unite in urging mainland China to respond to Taiwan's reasonable proposals and make the right decision on two-way opening as soon as possible so that the two sides can make comprehensive and proper arrangements for receiving travelers and maintaining travel safety.

The MAC reiterated that the government always values and cares about the safety of Taiwanese travelers in mainland China and has mechanisms in place to provide around-the-clock emergency assistance. The SEF's emergency service hotline (TEL: 02-2533-9995) is available 24/7. The MAC also operates the "Online Registration System for Taiwanese Citizens Visiting Mainland China" (URL: <https://gov.tw/wpQ>) and suggests that Taiwanese citizens register on the website prior to departure for mainland China; this will allow the government to get in immediate contact and provide necessary assistance and services in case of emergencies.