

Communicating in Good Faith, Seeking Common Understanding for Peace in the Taiwan Strait

Opening Remarks by
Hsiao-Yueh Chang

Minister

Mainland Affairs Council of the Republic of China

at the International Conference on

"Mainland China's Institutional Changes and Strategic Trends"

November 16, 2016

Professor Lin, Distinguished Scholars and Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning!

I am deeply honored to be invited to attend this international symposium held by the Institute for National Policy Research (INPR). This forum brings together domestic and foreign scholars and experts to discuss the far-reaching implications of many important issues in the special context of cross-Strait relations and institutional reforms and development in mainland China. Today, I will speak on current developments and the cross-Strait policy of the government of the Republic of China (R.O.C.).

1. Institutional reforms by the CPC amidst geopolitical strategic changes in the Asia-Pacific

Developments in the Asia-Pacific region represent a history of constant change, progress and cooperation. Since the Communist Party of China (CPC) came to power in 1949, the Mainland has witnessed a period of political, economic, social and cultural tumult extending from the Cultural Revolution to the proposal of opening and reforms at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978. In just 40 years since then, mainland China has vastly grown in strength. This development has been inspired by changes in the international order after the Cold War. It has also steadily affected the strategic pattern both internationally and in the Asia-Pacific region. Since the 18th National CPC Congress in 2012, the Mainland leader Xi Jinping has been more committed to accelerating deep reforms and institution-building in a number of areas. He is rebuilding mainland China's political, economic, social, and military order in ways that are profoundly impacting the life of one-fifth of the world's population. Mainland China's rise and the Chinese model of institutional development have surprised the world. It is, without question, a focus of concern and discussion in the international community today.

Taiwan has not stood apart from this trend. In the 1980s, we promoted economic development in conjunction with gradual democratization. Taiwan's adherence to the concepts and values of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law has exerted a positive influence and force in the process of cross-Strait relations. This

relationship has progressively evolved from past military confrontation to interaction and exchanges. The process has not been without ups and downs. But placed in historical context one can see that it is the inevitable product of institutional changes on both sides. Mainland China is also learning to face up to the development of democratic politics in Taiwan. Since May 20, relations between the two sides have been in a cooling-off phase, but there has not been any saber-rattling. Taiwan has shown restraint and taken a non-provocative and pragmatic attitude. This comes from an understanding of the difficult process and hard-won results of the past development of cross-Strait relations. We believe that mutual respect, goodwill, and understanding between the two sides can bring positive energy to cross-Strait and regional peace.

2. "Respect and understanding" are the keys to the development of cross-Strait relations

The two sides of the Taiwan Strait have chosen different systems. Yet both sides share the same goal of putting the welfare of the people first. For the past nearly six months, Taiwan has clearly expressed its respect for the historical fact of various joint acknowledgements and understandings achieved through communication and negotiations between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) in 1992. We have conducted cross-Strait affairs on the existing political foundation and in accordance with the Republic of China Constitution, the Act Governing Relations

between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation. And we have worked hard to maintain the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations. The R.O.C. government has been clear, consistent and firm in its cross-Strait policy views and stance. It has also shown the utmost flexibility. "Respect and understanding" are important attitudes in advancing the current development of cross-Strait relations. The Mainland should positively understand the goodwill in Taiwan's words and actions. It should not negatively interpret or deliberately conflate internal developments in Taiwan with independence acts or make unwarranted criticism. Such treatment is not appropriate.

I believe it is important to look at cross-Strait relations from a historical perspective. In 1987, Taiwan lifted restrictions on family-related visits to the Mainland. Since then, the government has continued to adjust policy actions in cross-Strait interactions. In 1991, Taiwan established the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) and the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF). It also formulated the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area to handle cross-Strait affairs and begin cross-Strait talks. In 2000, Taiwan introduced an economic and trade policy involving the promotion of the Mini Three Links and "proactive liberalization with effective management." This laid the foundation for the subsequent opening of direct cross-Strait transportation links, tourism, bilateral investment, and the signing of 23 cross-Strait agreements. Since May 20 of this year, the R.O.C. government has positively sought to maintain the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Such efforts include the proposal of the aforementioned discussion to narrow the

cognitive distance between the two sides. Based on the legal principle of equality, it has also promoted the inclusion of Mainland students in the National Health Insurance system, cared for the education and daily life of Mainland students and Mainland spouses in Taiwan, and built a safe travel environment for Mainland tourists. In its foreign economic layout, Taiwan has sought to develop cooperatively with mainland China and build mutual trust between the two sides. Beijing should understand our position with goodwill, positively view Taiwan's efforts, and reduce its targeted criticism and accusations against Taiwan.

3. Seeking common understanding through pragmatic communication and dialogue

The mechanisms for official interaction and institutionalized negotiations across the Taiwan Strait have been temporarily suspended. Although this has complicated efforts by the two sides to resolve their political differences and concerns, Taiwan proactively maintains contact with the other side on cross-Strait affairs through existing channels. We believe that understanding and respect, constructive communication and dialogue without preconditions are the most important keys to solving problems and building mutual trust. We also believe that sincerity and goodwill are the keys to finding new common awareness and understanding between the two sides.

Taiwan's invitation for communication and dialogue has attracted the

attention of the international community and mainland China. Taiwan fulfilled its responsibility in maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait. The differences between the two sides should not hinder the development of cross-Strait relations. Indeed, these differences require pragmatic communication and management to prevent the two sides from slipping into the vicious cycle of suspicion and stagnation. Closing doors does nothing to help clarify the facts or pursue cooperation. Constructive dialogue based on mutual respect for different developments, systems, ideologies, and social modes is the only way to remove barriers.

4. The government has consistently adhered to safeguarding the well-being of the people on both sides

The R.O.C. is a democratic country in which all policy formulations must take into consideration the majority opinion and respect the operation of democratic mechanisms. The R.O.C. is the greatest common denominator in Taiwan society. We hope that mainland China will pragmatically face up to this reality. People-to-people exchanges and interactions across the Taiwan Strait have continued for 30 years and have steadily intertwined the two civil societies. They have also gradually defused the past hard-power confrontation focused on armed conflict and replaced it with flexible exchanges and learning process in the economic, social and cultural spheres. Neither side wants opposition and dispute. We welcome normal cross-Strait people-to-people exchanges and contact for its positive contribution to promoting mutual understanding and building

mutual trust. We also believe that the recipe for promoting harmonious feelings between the people on the two sides includes mutual concern, interaction without political considerations and alternatives, a refusal to use "quantitative" or "physical" differences to suppress the other side, and a refusal to intensify confrontation and hostility in cross-Strait public opinion.

The well-being of people on both sides lies at the core of the development of cross-Strait relations. A MAC survey conducted in August this year found that 83.8% of the public support the government's policy commitment since May 20 to maintaining peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations; 77.5% of the public support handling cross-Strait relations by democratic mechanisms and in keeping with public opinion; and nearly 90% of the public support maintaining the status quo. Taiwan's cross-Strait policy is supported by the United States, the European Union, Japan and other countries. It also corresponds with the interests of regional parties. We hope that normal and healthy exchanges between the two sides will align the direction and rhythm of cross-Strait developments with the public's expectations and create momentum for further development on both sides.

5. Conclusion

Looking to the future, mainland China will need to implement reforms that will have a far-reaching impact. As the Mainland grows stronger, it will also change the global strategic order. We hope that the international

community will closely watch developments in the region. We also hope that during this change, the international community will continue to convey a strong message to mainland China the importance of maintaining peace, urge the Mainland to show more flexibility and goodwill, and encourage constructive dialogue between the two sides to maintain stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

Peace in the Taiwan Strait is an important cornerstone of regional prosperity and development. As a vital member of the Asia-Pacific region, the R.O.C. will more proactively develop Taiwan's geostrategic role and value, take concrete actions to maintain cross-Strait peace, and deepen all-round cooperation with countries friendly to Taiwan.

I hereby also urge mainland China to face up to the truth that cross-Strait relations have never been a one-way street or a single-plank bridge. Trust-building mechanisms between the two sides must be a two-way process and must come with "mutual guarantees." Facing new developments from internal reforms and mutual interactions across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan has already embraced a new discussion and direction. The Mainland must break away from old ways of thinking and its standard behavior towards Taiwan. The two sides can unlock the greatest possible space for cooperation by opening the door at the same time, facing up to each other, and working together to overcome difficulties.

In closing, I would like to thank you for joining us today and wish the symposium great success. Thank you!