

TAIWAN - Amended Assembly and Parade Act suppresses freedom of people!

Thursday, 30 July 2009

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The proposed amendment of the Assembly and Parade Act in Taiwan gives more power to police, say human rights organisations in Taiwan. Below is a commentary on Taipei Times issued on 20 July 2009, written by three authors including Liu Ching-yi, an executive board member of FORUM-ASIA member Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR).

On June 3, shortly before the end of the last legislative session, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus tabled its latest proposed amendment to the Assembly and Parade Act. It publicized the proposal the next day, claiming to have considered criticism and opinions from civic groups and opposition parties. In reality, however, the draft is full of proposals designed to suppress civil freedoms while giving the police room to abuse their powers. This draft is far removed from what civic groups want, namely a guarantee to the public's right to hold assemblies and parades.

The draft contains a number of absurdities, which are summed up in the following six points:

One, why can't we demonstrate in front of the Executive Yuan?

The Executive Yuan is the seat of the Cabinet and is the nation's highest executive body. Policies, draft legislation and the budgets of all ministries have to be sent there for approval. If people are unhappy with government policy, where are they supposed to protest if not at the Executive Yuan? Article 6 of the draft proposes a ban on assemblies and parades in a restricted zone with a radius of 300m around the building so the Cabinet mandarins cannot hear the voices of protest.

Two, while the draft says advance notice must be given for demonstrations, it actually means permission would be needed.

The KMT keeps saying arrangements for assemblies and parades will be changed to an advance notice system. However, Article 9 of the draft says that, when giving advance notice, organizers must show an agreement signed by whoever is responsible for managing the demonstration venue. That would be understandable if it referred only to private venues and non-public spaces. But why should people have to apply for permission from government departments for gatherings in places such as Liberty Square and Ketagalan Boulevard? How does that differ from the current law? Is that what the KMT calls "giving the streets back to the people?"

To read the complete commentary, please [click here](#) (TAHR website).