

TAIWAN ECUMENICAL FORUM FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

Steering Group Meeting

Taiwan's International Status

Victor Hsu

July 23, 2018

Forward

"Hell is other people." This is the famous declaration that comes at the close of Jean Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*, in French) which he wrote in 1943. The play depicts the arrival of three characters – Garcin, Estelle, and Inez – in hell – which happens to be a drawing room. As the characters struggle to understand what sin has led them to hell, and what their punishment will be, they quickly surmise that there is no torturer, no executioner and no fire and brimstone to burn their souls eternally. It's just the three of them, trapped in a deadlock.

"All those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only two of you? I thought there were more; many more. So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker. HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE!"

No Exit perfectly illustrates the difficult coexistence of people: the fact that others – and their gaze – is what alienates and locks me in as a particular kind of being, which in turn deprives me of my freedom.

One literary critic of the 20th century existentialism said that the ephemerality, rather than being an eternal damnation, as it is for the characters in *No Exit*, should be interpreted as a form of freedom and a cause for hope in a context of greater uncertainty.

As I was preparing my talk today to bring you up to date with recent developments related to Taiwan's international status, I kept on thinking about "No Exit." It pains me greatly to share Taiwan's humiliation in the international community. Taiwan's situation is such that it can say Hell is Other People, not just China, as I will illustrate in this presentation. To be sure, China has used its diplomatic and economic muscle to trap Taiwan in a deadlock from which, seemingly, there is No Exit.

It is my duty to tell the story to assist you to determine how TEF can be an instrument of hope and solace to the PCT and to the people of Taiwan. The PCT believes that Micah 6:8 gives the mandate to the whole *oikoumene*:

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

For the PCT, the Taiwanese Christians, since 1865, have a Biblical perspective as they root their faith concretely in the land they call Taiwan. The PCT’s Confession of Faith pledges the church to identify with all Taiwan’s inhabitants, and through love and suffering becomes the sign of hope for the country.

The PCT believes that supporting the TEF gives meaning and substance to ecumenism and reiterates the longstanding conviction that ecumenical organizations have a responsibility to stand with a church that covets the accompaniment of the worldwide fellowship as this church seeks national dignity, national sovereignty and the basic human rights to self-determination.

Background on Taiwan’s Status as an International Orphan

Taiwan is the size of Belgium or Switzerland, a mid-sized nation. In population it is larger than 70 percent of the 194 members of the UN. In GDP it ranks above 80 to 90 percent of the UN member states. It has a competent and affordable, universal, single-payer healthcare system that covers 97 percent of its people. Its medical teams have been acknowledged to have contributed to solving world health problems.

Since President Richard Nixon traveled to China in 1972 and began Washington's abandonment of official diplomatic and military relations with Taiwan, three main “notions” defined the US-China-Taiwan trilateral relationship: one-China, cross-Strait stability between Taiwan and China, and US strategic ambiguity. These three points formed the cornerstone and framework in the international community and, are responsible, I contend, for making Taiwan an international orphan for the past four decades. So it is necessary to understand this framework in order to appreciate Taiwan’s dire situation today.

One China Policy / Principle

For Taiwan, the 1972 US-China Shanghai Communique has been called the "original sin" of the trilateral, and the subsequent foundation of international relationships. It laid out the two sides' understandings on the existence of a single Chinese polity encompassing both sides of the Taiwan Strait that at its narrowest is only 90 miles apart. Beijing stated its position that, as a matter of historical, cultural, and juridical fact, China and Taiwan are part of one legal entity called the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is known as the "one-China principle."

Washington, on the other hand, simply acknowledged that all “Chinese” on both sides of the Strait shared that view, differing only on who should rule the merged

territories. The US position stated the "expectation" that the issue would be resolved "peacefully."

Incidentally, the architect of the Shanghai Communique, Henry Kissinger, warned Taipei in 2007 that "China will not wait forever" - a message Xi Jinping was only too glad to echo shortly after assuming power when he said the Taiwan question "cannot be passed on from generation to generation."

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) annual meeting on Taiwan affairs closed in early February. At the meeting, Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang, incoming chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), stressed that a new era required a new approach to Taiwan affairs.

"We should remain true to our original aspiration, keep our mission firmly in mind, and fully implement the CCP Central Committee's decisions and plans [for Taiwan affairs] in a spirit of 'time and tide wait for no man; seize the day, seize the hour,'" Wang said.

Over the past two years, Xi Jinping's government has left no stone unturned in its attempts to intimidate Taiwan: militarily through exercises and circumnavigation flights; diplomatically through its relentless efforts to isolate Taiwan; and economically through its carrot-and-stick approach.

Cross-Taiwan Strait Status Quo

The Shanghai Communique envisions "peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait as conceptually equivalent to preservation of "the status quo." Washington repeatedly has called on both sides to avoid actions that would upset that undefined stasis and create tension and instability. In my opinion, this position has greatly impacted the manner in which Taiwan's governments since the end of the martial law in 1987, conducted their diplomacy. They always worry about the Big Brother. (e.g. WV Taiwan humanitarian aid to the DPRK).

Ever since October 25, 1971 when Taiwan's Republic of China (ROC) government was replaced by the PRC in the United Nations by a USA- initiated Resolution 2758, a serious competition and rivalry characterized the Cross-Strait relations. In shorthand, this competition and rivalry became known internationally as "checkbook diplomacy", exploited by many governments.

Taiwan's sensitive international status and limited resources have made it hard for the nation to make new friends and keep old ones. Beijing's repeated efforts to flaunt its deep pockets has only made it more difficult. Since Tsai's election, five of Taiwan's former allies – the Gambia, Sao Tome and Principe, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso – have switched recognition to Beijing.

The US-China relationship presently is on a negative trajectory, and the reverberations already are being felt in Taiwan. As strategic competition intensifies, Taiwan's margin for error shrinks.

US Strategic Ambiguity

Washington's response to China's decades-long threats of aggression against Taiwan, beginning with the Shanghai Communique itself, is the quintessential doctrine of strategic ambiguity regarding the defense of Taiwan: "We don't know and you don't know. It would depend on the circumstances." Beijing's strategic military planners have been preparing ever since to create the circumstances that would keep the United States from intervening in a cross-strait conflict to defend Taiwan.

Soon after being elected - but before assuming office - US President Donald Trump accepted a congratulatory telephone call from Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen. Beijing was displeased. It saw this pre-arranged phone exchange as a portend of Trump's upcoming change in its China policy.

Moreover, Trump personally unveiled the annual National Security Strategy Report on Dec. 18 last year. For the first time since 1990, the report mentioned Taiwan by name and clearly reaffirmed the US defense commitment to Taiwan. The US intends to "maintain our strong ties to Taiwan in accordance with our 'one China' policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan's legitimate defense needs and deter coercion."

In March this year, the US Congress unanimously passed and Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act, designed to give moral and political support to Taipei by encouraging US officials to make recognized visits to the country.

Exactly two weeks ago, China urged the United States to avoid actions that endanger peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait after two US warships sailed through the waters. US officials announced that two destroyers carried out the passage over the weekend, calling the maneuver a "routine transit" through international waters. The ships' passage also followed a series of Chinese military drills around the island that have increased friction between Taipei and Beijing.

PRC Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said, "the Taiwan issue is related to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. We urge the United States to at once scrupulously abide by the one-China principle...and avoid harming China-US relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

New Paradigm for an International Orphan: David v/s Goliath

In both the US and Taiwan, policy-makers have been discussing a possible new paradigm to define US-Taiwan-China trilateral relations. Naturally, without China's involvement it will have a limited impact. However, the new discussion has generated heat debates here in Taiwan. For example, last month, former president Lee Teng-hui, the first Taiwanese to become President in 1996, went right to the crux of the problem facing Taiwan.

“It appears,” Lee mentioned, as evidenced by the “Greater China mindset” – “that a national Stockholm syndrome” is making Taiwanese “so prone to adopt the beliefs of their ‘captor’, in this case China, that many Taiwanese, either consciously or unconsciously, are aligning their mindset with terms defined and dictated by China, without realizing that deep down in their hearts they are the ones denying and belittling themselves.”

This type of mentality is exactly what Beijing is counting on in its relentless attempts to degrade Taiwan internationally. President Lee went on to say that “it is regrettable to note that such a mindset has taken hold not only on the public, but also of government officials, as indicated by various incidents in which officials have refrained from boldly demanding the correction of Taiwan's name at international events.” President Lee was quite sharp in his analysis but I would add an additional factor: what I referred to earlier as the impact of the Bir Brother's strategic ambivalence.

I believe there is an urgent need for the Taiwanese and government officials to understand that self-respect gains respect. If Taiwan is seeking international affirmation of its dignity and sovereignty, it must manifest its own national pride and dignity.

The familiar story of little David, son of Jesse, going against a terrifying Philistine, Goliath (1 Samuel 17: 50-51) can be a modern parable of Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen going against China's Xi Jing-ping: a tiny military of Taiwan going against a modern China with satellites and the most advanced lethal missiles, 4000 of which are aimed at Taiwan. David and Goliath can also be a parable of Taiwan's struggle for international recognition. Today, only 18 out of 194 UN member states have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. These 18 allies of Taiwan are constantly subjected to immense political and economic pressure to switch their recognition to the PRC.

Let me cite a few recent examples to illustrate Taiwan's plight in the international community.

Denied Visitor Access to the United Nations

On September 21, 2015, a Taiwanese tourist visiting the United Nations Office at

Geneva was refused entry by security officers who rejected both her passport and national ID card and told her to return with a valid Chinese passport.

In an interview with UN spokesperson at the Geneva office, Rhéal LeBlanc, a reporter, Marc Engelhardt, discovered that China holds more sway at the United Nations than some might expect.

"The member state that is recognized by the international community is the People's Republic of China, Taiwan being a province of that state. We recognize China, so the passport of Taiwan is not recognized by the UN. We have to be respectful of our member states," said LeBlanc. He added that the rule had been in action for a long time and problems do not surface regularly.

The Taiwanese tourist's story has certainly struck some as extremely odd because it is regularly taken for granted that Taiwanese citizens can travel through international borders with their ROC passport. Now, apparently, Taiwanese tourists visiting New York are being denied entry to the UN headquarters. On June 17, 2016, China Power Project director, Bonnie Glaser, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies said that Taiwanese people visiting the UN building – to take a tour like thousands of people from around the world – were turned away. In the Visitors Section of the UN Website, "New UN Access" indicates that all visitors 18 years and older now require a government-issued photo identification issued by a member or an observer state to enter UN headquarters.

This effectively rules out all Taiwanese because their photo IDs are all provided by Taiwan, and not by the PRC.

Denied Scholar Access to the United Nations

Prof. Li-chuan Liuhuang of Chung Cheng University has been taking an international labor law study group to the annual meeting of the ILO governing board. But in June 2016, her study group was blocked from observing the proceedings. ILO director-general Guy Ryder in a response to the Professor, cited the UN regulations in explaining his decision to refuse her group access. In an e-mail, ILO spokesman Hans von Rohland said: "Any visitor is required to hold a passport of a state or entity recognized by the United Nations under relevant General Assembly resolutions."

When asked by Associated Press how Liu Huang's group had gained admission in previous years, von Rohland cited tighter security standards as one reason. He said that recent terror attacks in Paris and Brussels also were a factor. "Due to the current security situation in Europe, international organizations have tightened their security measures," he said. "On that basis, we had no choice to decide otherwise."

The episode highlights justified concerns about where and when China might seek to block Taiwanese interests in the international arena since President Tsai Ing-wen took

office. Prof. Liu Huang said in her letter that "the access application went smoothly" in 2014 and 2015. "This year, we came with the same goals ... and the access was unexpectedly denied."

Denied Participation in World Health Organization Assembly

Since 2009, Taiwan has been invited by the WHO to participate as an observer to its World Health Assembly (WHA). In 2016, after Tsai was elected, the invitation came later than usual, just a few days before the inauguration of President Tsai on May 21. The invitation letter referred to the United Nations Resolution 2758 of October 25, 1971. Referring to Res. 2758 was the first time since Taiwan was admitted to the WHA as an observer in 2009. What was unusual was that "Chinese Taipei", the official name given to Taiwan by the World Health Organization and other international organizations like the Olympic Games, would participate in the WHA under "One China Principle." In 2017, without discussion and decision of any Member State of the Organization, and any legal basis, Taiwan was not invited to attend the WHA. I deem it most humiliating for President Tsai to send a delegation under the name of Chinese Taipei. The name of Taiwan was not mentioned, let alone recognized.

Such a situation is really incomprehensible because excluding 23.5 million of people living in Taiwan is against the principles of WHO, namely "Health for All" and the "Right to Health."

Ignored by the Permanent Court of Arbitration

On July 11, 2016 the tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) rendered its decision on a grievance by the Philippines. The PCA invalidated China's claim to the Spratlys based on the UN Law of the Sea Convention to which China is a signatory. Both China and Taiwan stated that the arbitration is completely unacceptable and that the tribunal's decisions have no legally binding force.

While this indignant and defiant posture is to be expected from China, most people in Taiwan and around the world are not aware that the PCA refused to have a hearing by Taiwan. Though China refused to attend the hearing, it was provided with daily transcripts and all documents submitted during the course of the hearing. It was also invited to comment on the proceedings. A large delegation from the Philippines, representatives from Australia, the Republic of Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam attended the hearing as observers. Taiwan was not invited to participate nor to comment on the proceedings.

The PCA is located at the Hague in the Netherlands. It provides services of arbitral tribunal to resolve disputes between member states, international organizations, or private parties arising out of international agreements. The cases involve a range of

legal issues pertaining to territorial and maritime boundaries, sovereignty, human rights, international investment, and international and regional trade. The PCA is not a UN agency, but a separate organization comprising 119 member states. I find it terribly stressing that this international organization, entirely separate from the UN, chose to ignore Taiwan's right to be heard and to participate in the proceedings.

Denied Legal Rights of Taiwan's Criminal Syndicates

In 2016, 45 Taiwanese telecommunications fraud suspects were arrested in Kenya and another 32 arrested in Malaysia. All 77 criminals were sent to China at Beijing's request.

The story in Kenya is worth noting because all 45 were deported to [China](#) following a trial for fraud in [Kenya](#). Eight among the 45 were acquitted of telecommunications, immigration and organized crime charges on April 5. But China blocked these eight from returning to Taiwan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) issued a statement calling China's move an "illegal capture of people through uncivilized conduct," and it said the move "seriously harmed the rights of the people involved." But Taiwan's protest fell on deaf ears in Kenya which refused to allow Taiwan government officials to visit the criminals to offer legal assistance.

Similar deportations to China were made by Cambodia. Five Taiwanese, along with 35 Chinese nationals, were deported to China on August 8, days after they were acquitted by a local court of telecommunications fraud.

Earlier this year, several UN human rights experts have expressed concern about Spain's decision to deport Taiwanese fraud suspects to China, saying that they could face torture and other ill treatment there. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published an article in which the experts urged Spain to halt deportations of fraud suspects to China after two Taiwanese were deported to China. The two were part of a group of 269 suspects, including 219 Taiwanese, who were arrested by Spanish authorities in December 2016 over their alleged involvement in telecom fraud.

"Any policy of deporting people without due process safeguards, case-by-case risk assessments and adequate protection measures violates international law and exposes them to the risk of further human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and torture," the experts said.

According to Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Beijing demanded that all the suspects be sent to China for investigation and trial on the grounds that all the fraud victims were "Chinese" nationals.

Since the first such incident in April 2016, several nations have chosen to abide by Beijing's "one China" principle and deport Taiwanese fraud suspects to China, including Kenya, Armenia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The latest deportations by Spain raised the number of Taiwanese telecom fraud suspects who have been deported to China to more than 360.

These are just a few examples of how Taiwan and the people of Taiwan are being humiliated by the international community, mainly at the instigation of China. Even criminals are being transferred to China, including those found "Not Guilty". Now, too, Taiwanese are not allowed to visit the UN, the most important international institution in the post-World War II era.

Escalating Bullying Tactics

Over the first three months of this year, China constricted Taiwan's international space in 10 incidents, adding to 49 such incidents last year, 18 in 2016 and 13 in 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs data showed. It also unilaterally launched northbound flights on an aviation route, which is close to the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

China's other tactics, in addition to forcing Taiwan's diplomatic allies to switch their recognition, barring the nation from the WHA and coercing other nations to deport Taiwanese fraud suspects to China for trial, it persuaded multilateral institutions to deny Taiwan's membership application to the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Interpol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Over the past few months, Beijing has been pressuring foreign airlines to list Taiwan on their website as Taiwan, China. It has demanded that foreign firms begin referring to Taiwan as a Chinese territory on their Web sites along with Hong Kong and Macau. The Civil Aviation Administration of China indicated that 18 of the 44 airlines such as Air Canada, Lufthansa and British Airways have complied.

The final deadline is in a couple of days, July 25.

The White House on May 5 hit back at Beijing's demand that US airlines comply with Chinese standards on how they refer to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, describing the demands as "Orwellian nonsense."

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "No matter what the United States says, it cannot change the objective fact that there is only one China in the world, and that Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are indivisible parts of Chinese territory."

The spat has become "another grain of sand in the wound" amid escalating trade tensions, as Donald Trump imposed tariffs on billions of US dollars of Chinese imports to punish Beijing for intellectual property abuses.

In other notable incidents:

- (a) In February the Hakka Affairs Council of Taiwan was to attend a cultural exchange event in Mauritius, but the hotel canceled the event, citing pressure from the Chinese embassy.
- (b) Similarly, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Jordan was invited to the International City Festival in May, but the host removed Republic of China national flags from Taiwan's booth due to Chinese pressure.
- (c) Japanese retailer Muji was fined 200,000 yuan (US\$31,307) for packaging that identified Taiwan as a separate nation, reported Shanghai's Administration for Industry and Commerce.
- (d) The state-owned Global Times reported that online shoppers complained about a T-shirt sold by US clothing retailer Gap, showing a map of China that omitted Taiwan, Tibet, part of the South China Sea and Aksai Chin, a large disputed border area between India and China. Gap apologized and withdrew the T-shirts. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Lu Kang noted the apology and said the ministry would be following the company's actions.
- (e) On January 26, the United States removed the Republic of China (ROC) flag from the Web sites of the Department of State Consular Affairs and the US government Trade Representative Office raising grave concerns in Taiwan whether its most strategically important ally is slipping away amid pressure from China. Upon enquiry by Taiwan, the US Department of State spokeswoman Heather Nauert said that its policy and commitment toward Taiwan remain unchanged. It also reiterated that US remains committed to its "one China" policy based on the Three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act. "We consider Taiwan to be a vital partner, a democratic success story and a force for good in the world. Taiwan shares our values and has earned our respect, and continues to merit our strong support," Nauert said on January 27.

The Economist recently described all these actions of China as a form of "sharp power," that relies on a combination of bullying, bribery, coercion, and information manipulation to suppress challenges to China's interests and muffle criticism of Chinese behavior.

Chinese Army by Proxy

In February this year, New York Times carried two stories about two Taiwanese waitresses working in two Chinese restaurants in Sydney, Australia: Yang Yating and Tuan Man-Tzu. In each instance, their owners suddenly asked them about their nationality while they were serving. In each instance they replied, "Taiwanese." But the owners told them that they were "Chinese" even though they

were born in Taiwan. Having made the point with restaurants guests present, they were each surreptitiously fired. This is a disturbing story because Chinese nationals were involved in exercising their power over the Taiwanese. For the Taiwanese, like the airlines and the businesses, there is a personal cost of being Taiwanese, as well, even making a livelihood outside Taiwan.

No Exit?

In analyzing Taiwan's international status, it is necessary to examine the direction of global dynamics and place Taiwan in that context. What conflicts might be on the horizon? Political scientist Samuel Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations* in 1996 – responding to changes economic, the fall of the Berlin Wall; and the apparent end of the Cold War in Europe. According to him, with the victory of capitalism over socialistic communism, ideological conflicts could be over. Political scientist Francis Fukuyama supported this understanding and posited the end of “ideological history.”

However, the economic and ideological dialectic did not end with the Cold War. Conflicts still litter the political landscape, and largely within the capitalistic framework of a globalized world. In this new capitalistic paradigm, a violent struggle is gaining precedence between the haves and the have-nots, that is, between the oligarchs of capitalism and those remaining. The battle now pits the general 98 percent of the globalized world against the 2 percent, known as the purveyors of the Empire that control the overwhelming majority of wealth.

Taiwan is a mid-sized nation ranking high among the upper percentiles of nations whether it be in economics, population or GDP. Taiwan also has media freedom. Taiwan has obvious competition in trade and economy with other nations, but that competition does not of itself create enemies.

Taiwan's real and primary enemy is found not in religion or culture, but in ideology. That enemy is the one-party state, China, which threatens war with Taiwan because it is an independent and democratic nation.

Whatever the rhetoric, this is where the real future clash will be for Taiwan. It is ideological and territorial. This analysis is what I call a No Exit position for Taiwan's aspiration to national sovereignty.

Is there an Exit? Former Singaporean Ambassador to the UN, Kishore Mahbubani is a rare thinker among the diplomats whose writings I have monitored over the years. In an interview during his visit to Taiwan last year, he told the Taiwanese audience that the 21st century belongs to Asia, with China leading the way. “The West, whose global dominance over the past 200 years is a ‘historical aberration’ had better make way. If Taiwan has any sense, it will play nice with China or risk getting kicked around like a political football.”

The supplanting of the West by China and India is an idea he has espoused for some time. A world order dominated by the economies of China and India existed for the 18 centuries preceding the early 19th century, when North America and Europe became more powerful. He argues that we are now living through a readjustment back to the “natural order.”

Over the next 10 years, “Taiwan needs to be careful with which side it affiliates itself”, he said. “Taiwan, like Singapore, is a small island jostling for a voice in an international arena dominated by more powerful players, and as such, it needs to be practical,” he advised.

Ambassador Mahubani’s advice to Taiwan reminds me of a saying by an ancient Greek historian, Thucydides who said that “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.” He was explaining the cruelty of a state in its pursuit of military power to maintain its continuity and survival in an anarchic world.

In today’s world, the conditions required for a nation’s survival no longer depend solely on military strength. The ability to form alliances and exert influence that arises from a country’s political system, cultural values and way of life are more effective than warfare.

But what insights for Taiwan does the scripture provide?

Parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) to the Land of Milk and Honey (Joshua 3:3)

Taiwan’s place in the international community today is akin to the Hebrew people in captivity in Egypt. Wherever it turns, whether in sports, in scientific and health fields, in international trade shows or even in an international organization that safeguards workers’ rights like the ILO, Taiwan is denied full access, full participation or full engagement. Wherever it attempts to move or to transform itself, it is shown the “No Exit” sign. Taiwan is in desperate need of an exodus from captivity, a captivity amounting to the denial of the integrity of the Taiwanese people, who are treated either as a second-class citizen or are ignored altogether as if they don’t exist.

Exodus 14 describes the Hebrew people at the bank of the Red Sea. Moses was there to part the Red Sea for his people. God protected them by drowning the pursuing Egyptians and their chariots.

The people of Taiwan yearn to cross the Red Sea and to enter the land of milk and honey. My prayer for Taiwan is not that God should drown all those unfriendly to Taiwan. My fervent supplication is that the people of Taiwan should be given the room to breathe, to enjoy their dignity and God-given freedom and to participate actively in international life as they manifest their soft power and beauty

All throughout the White Terror period, the PCT and Taiwan discovered that Taiwan has no shortage of Joshuas (Joshua 3:3). The PCT stands ready to make the Jordan crossing carrying the Ark of the Covenant as a people of faith.

Redeemer as Exit

In this sense, the Redeemer is the Exit. Listen to the ancient text as recorded in Isaiah 43.

*Thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
You are Mine.*

*²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.*

*³For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
⁴Since you were precious in My sight,
You have been honored,
And I have loved you;*

*¹⁹Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.
Because I give waters in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert,
To give drink to My people, My chosen.
²¹This people I have formed for Myself;
They shall declare My praise.*

The PCT has been formed, made and chosen by God. The Taiwanese people are precious in God’s sight. If the PCT remains faithful, God will be faithful and continue to embrace it with honor and love.

Challenges to TEF

At the recent Central Committee meeting, the co-moderator of the WCC’s Reference Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, Fernando Enns, observed that “The pilgrim experience is one great communal prayer by walking together.” “Being on the way, doing theology in an ecumenical horizon becomes a theology of mutual

accompaniment, of companionship of those who share the bread with each other on the way.”

Frank Chikane, moderator of the WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs said that in accompanying the people by “getting to where people are, builds confidence and trust that make it easier to assist such communities and people to find peace with justice.” Reflecting on the meaning of the close accompaniment to people in context of conflict and division, he insisted that “*to be left alone without other external forces or benefactors that pursue their own interests, the people are able to find solutions to seemingly intractable problems and challenges*”.

I wonder if Chikane’s experience in conflict situations can be true of our situation here in Taiwan. Certainly, the problems are seemingly intractable even though the solutions proposed for Taiwan’s sovereignty are already on the table.

Ecumenical Conviction amidst Chaos

In our first meeting, we discussed many issues related to TEF especially with regard to the Terms of Reference (TOR). Ecumenical institutions such as the WCC have refused to accompany the PCT and many of our partners are receiving pressure not to be part of the TEF. Furthermore, within the SG, we have different views, as the Minutes recorded, about the purpose and the program of TEF. All in all, it seems that the ecumenical conversations are somewhat chaotic.

I am reminded of the response of the disciples in a storm on Lake Galilee. The Gospel of Mark (4:35-41) describes that they are shaken by a violent squall and their future looks bleak. They have put their lives in jeopardy by their own decision to follow Jesus to a new shore. Peter, Andrew, James, and John – fishermen recruited by Jesus – would have been no strangers to the deadly storms of the Sea of Galilee and the frequent life-silencing dramas in these waters.

Biblical scholars tell us about the frequent use of allegory of hyperbole in the scripture. In the ancient Near East, water and wind together symbolized chaos and disorder. Chaos shakes the disciples’ ship and fills it with water – a scene of shaking and sinking that manifests in an expedition beyond their familiar experience. Not only is their Gentile destination fraught with uncertainty and hostility, but the journey itself also challenges their faith and jeopardizes their peace.

“Teacher, do you not care that we are dying?” they asked. Their frantic appeal to Jesus is a petition for him not only to calm the sea but to help remove the water weighing down the boat. However, instead of adjusting to chaos, Jesus tranquilizes their environment. Can it be that following Jesus opens us to the shaking and sinking of chaos? It is also an ongoing crash course of interaction with chaos.

From the very beginning of the scripture, Genesis 1:1 reveals the cosmic possibilities of chaos. God declares light in the midst of the big bang or the black hole, prehistoric chaotic context of the earth.

In the vortex of chaos, there is a platform for shared growth and social change. However messy, disorienting, and dangerous – chaos often presents opportunities to see God anew. The disciples have questions about Jesus, and Jesus has questions about them. “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” they ask each other. “Why are you afraid?” he asks them. “Have you still no faith?” Caution and fear make sense in the consuming context of the chaotic. But people of faith are challenged to wake up to initiate a courageous discourse with chaos.

To speak under the threat posed by the waves and the winds of insecurity is to exhibit at the same time our inadequacy and inability to calm the chaos around us. We acknowledge our being unable to cope with the demands of our social environment that embodies the iniquity of inequity and injustice. Despite that, our abiding faith impels us to proclaim with the unimpeachable authority of our teacher. While the world loses its head, we can shut up the forces of chaos if we dare open our mouths and speak.

Taiwan’s deep aspirations for national sovereignty and dignity are not a distant and unrealistic dream. Taiwan can surmount this formidable pilgrimage with a combination of stubborn perseverance, divine wisdom and international support. It is certainly impossible for Taiwan to tackle this challenge alone, even though our prayer continues to be that God will have mercy on Taiwan and perform mighty deeds for this beautiful island.

One major consequence of the international ostracization of Taiwan’s government officials highlights the unique role that the PCT can play in helping to break out of the isolation. The ROC officials have no access to all but the 18 countries with which it has diplomatic recognition. They cannot make representation on their own behalf or on behalf of the people of Taiwan. The logical implication is that NGOs in Taiwan such as the PCT have to pick up the mantle of people to people diplomacy and advocacy, though these have to be pursued delicately taking into account the political sensitivities. PCT’s ecumenical and partner church connections, including TEF, may be mobilized to play this unique role for the people of Taiwan.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “A small body of determined spirits can alter the course of history.” We invite you to accompany us in our exodus journey, to cross the chaotic Red Sea and to enter the Promised Land. Indeed, our faith informs us that there is an Exit. We thank you for responding to our invitation to be the Steering Group of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum for Justice and Peace. You are God’s blessing to the PCT and to Taiwan. We shall overcome. God be praised!