

**Remarks by David Tawei Lee, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the  
Republic of China, at the Foreign and National Defense Committee  
of the Legislative Yuan**

October 27, 2016

**1. Foreword: Diplomatic landscape since May 20, 2016**

Honorable chairperson, members of the Legislative Yuan, ladies and gentlemen: Good morning!

It is a great honor to be here once again, at the invitation of the esteemed Foreign and National Defense Committee, to present my briefing on the current international landscape and our diplomatic undertakings.

When I presented my first briefing to the honorable members of this committee on May 25, I introduced the new government's vision of and blueprint for future diplomatic endeavors. Looking back at the past five months, several events developed beyond our expectations and impacted upon our diplomatic work, including the July 12 award rendered by the tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in the case brought by the Philippines against mainland China under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was not in our favor; and our failing to receive an invitation to attend the 39th International Civil Aviation Organization Assembly, a triennial event convened in Montreal, Canada, in late September—despite being invited to the 38th assembly in 2013. In addition, speculation about our relations with certain diplomatic allies was also stirred up due to interactions between mainland China and these countries, and especially between mainland China and the Holy See.

However, during the same period we also made a number of successful diplomatic sallies, including Minister of Health and Welfare Lin Tzou-yien's attendance at the 69th World Health Assembly in May, despite a more difficult diplomatic situation than in previous years; the arrangement of President Tsai's visits to two diplomatic allies, Panama and Paraguay; and the arrangement of Vice President Chen Chien-jen's visits to the Dominican Republic and the Holy See. The visits made by the president and vice president have not only borne rich fruit in terms of promoting bilateral relations, but have also significantly increased our international visibility.

All of these developments are not just crucial to our dignity, rights, and interests in the international community; they also involve the interaction of complicated international factors, cross-strait relations, and our relationships with diplomatic allies. In the foreseeable future, our diplomatic situation will continue to present challenges and opportunities at one and the same time. To expand foreign relations while advancing our national interests and upholding our country's dignity, my colleagues and I will maintain a cautious and conscientious manner, adopting strategic ways of thinking to examine the overall situation facing our diplomatic work, and make adjustments to our approaches, so as to ensure that our policies and conduct serve the nation's highest interests and meet public expectations.

## **2. Evaluating our diplomatic advantages and disadvantages, as well as opportunities and challenges, through SWOT analysis**

### **2.1. Advantages and opportunities**

### **2.1.1. Holding fast to the core values of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights; deepening relations with like-minded countries**

We have always maintained good bilateral relations with many important countries—such as the United States, Japan and European nations—who share with us the same core values of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. Due to globalization, international cooperation is needed more than ever in areas involving nontraditional security issues such as environmental sustainability, medical aid, disease control and prevention, the combating of transnational crime, and disaster prevention and reduction. The professional experience that we have hitherto accumulated in related fields now affords us opportunities to deepen multilateral cooperation with the aforementioned countries through these regional issues.

### **2.1.2. Internationally competitive industries and talents, advantageous geographic position as effective instruments for expanding relations with other countries**

Taiwan's advantages in such areas as semiconductors, machine tools, wind turbines, information and communications technology, photovoltaics, biomedicine, medical apparatus and agricultural technology afford us a vital position in the world. As many countries compete to make inroads into the emerging economies of neighboring Southeast and South Asia, our experience of economic development, strengths in related industries and critical geographical position in the Asia-Pacific region will not only offer us the opportunities and space to

expand business and trade, but will also assist us, through our industrial strengths and talents, in actively increasing cooperation and exchange with our diplomatic allies and key partners both within and without the region.

### **2.1.3 NGOs, alive with vigor and capacity in international humanitarian affairs, making concrete contributions to the international community and creating positive image of the ROC**

Taiwan boasts a vibrant civil society and is home to a range of NGOs alive with vigor and capacity. Over many years, their active participation in international humanitarian assistance work, based on a spirit of empathy, has produced concrete results for all to see. To take the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, for example, the Taiwan International Health Action team, formed by various domestic NGOs with MOFA's support, engaged in postdisaster recovery and assistance: The large number of personnel on this team put Taiwan sixth among nations dispatching similar teams, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This illustrates the outstanding capacity of Taiwan's NGOs, which provide the finest backing for MOFA as we go about promoting Taiwan's international humanitarian assistance and diplomatic work.

## **2.2. Weaknesses and challenges**

### **2.2.1 Limited diplomatic resources, lack of consensus between ruling and opposition parties on a number of issues**

The relative disadvantages we currently face include challenges

stemming from economic transformation and upgrading, national financial difficulties and the government's relatively limited diplomatic resources. In addition, a number of diplomatic policies are in need of further consensus domestically.

### **2.2.2. Mainland China constricting ROC's international participation with increasing strength, flexibility and intensity**

Mainland China indisputably represents the biggest challenge in our diplomatic work. In its bilateral engagements, mainland China is using economic, military and similar forms of hard power as diplomatic tools to either lure away our diplomatic allies or to sell their one China policy aggressively among friendly countries with which we do not maintain diplomatic ties. In multilateral arenas, although it should be our right to take part in international meetings and activities on an equal footing, our international participation has been constantly constricted by mainland China over the years, and has come under even stronger pressure of late. This past July, for example, our officials were forced to leave the venue for a meeting of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Committee on Fisheries; in September, we failed to receive an invitation, as three years ago for the 38th ICAO Assembly, to attend the 39th ICAO Assembly; and even the national emblems on the uniforms of our representatives participating in the 2016 Summer Paralympics were required to be changed. Thus, it is clear to see that mainland China's pressure upon us in constricting our international participation is growing wider in scope, more intensive, and more flexible in approach, leaving us with ever sterner challenges when trying to participate in international activities.

### **2.2.3. International engagement remains dominated by realism; ROC's rights and interests could be impacted by other countries as they attempt to defend their national interest**

The situation in the South China Sea, the regional strategic tussle between mainland China and the United States, the rights and interests of countries concerned with developing resources, and our national interests being compromised as a result of the award rendered by the tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the South China Sea arbitration, are all cases in point.

However, I want to particularly emphasize that a crisis can be turned to one's advantage, and that a challenge represents something of an opportunity. With our diplomatic resources limited as they are, we should be giving fuller play to our strengths in economics and trade, to our NGOs, and to public diplomacy. Indeed, unable to establish diplomatic ties with many countries due to the mainland China factor, we should instead be focusing our engagement with foreign countries on issues of nontraditional but substantive diplomacy in nature. And as to the differences between the ruling and opposition parties, we should be striving to seek maximum consensus, transcending political affiliations, and work in the best interests of the nation.

### **3. Solutions and responses**

My colleagues and I at MOFA have remained consistently committed to protecting the ROC's national interests and to earning our country the

dignity and international participation it deserves, with steadfast diplomacy as the core objective and task of our mission. In the future, MOFA will continue to pursue the following 10 major objectives:

### **3.1. Consolidating diplomatic relations by continuing to promote reciprocal, mutually beneficial steadfast diplomacy**

During her visit to Panama and Paraguay, President Tsai articulated a new line of diplomatic thinking distinguished by the principles of steadfast diplomacy and mutual assistance for mutual benefits. The president believes that all foreign aid and cooperation projects should be tailor made to the individual situation, allowing both sides to benefit.

Thanks to the sterling efforts of the members of the Taiwan Technical Mission in Panama, a project to reestablish the Holy Ghost orchid, Panama's national flower, provides the best example of the principle of mutual assistance for mutual benefits. The initiative has allowed this flower to blossom in the beautiful land of Panama once again, while also allowing the technical mission to develop more advanced and sophisticated breeding and cultivation techniques.

Since May 20, several official visits arranged by MOFA for those at the highest level of government have allowed our leaders and counterpart heads of state to engage in a wide range of discussions as to the scope of bilateral cooperation, to understand the areas in which our countries might complement one another, and to elaborate projects involving mutual assistance. Looking ahead, we will continue to discuss issues of mutual concern with our diplomatic allies, and jointly promote mutually beneficial methods of cooperation and exchange, thus deepening bilateral

interaction and exchange, and establishing sustainable partnerships.

## **3.2. Deepening and expanding relations with like-minded countries, such as the United States, Japan, and European Union members**

### **3.2.1. Relations with the United States**

Our relations with the United States form the most important link in our foreign relations. Since President Tsai took office in May, we have upheld the principles of staying low key and consistent in managing our relations with the United States, with our efforts to maintain mutual trust earning the affirmation of the US government. In early October, the two sides held consultations under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. On November 8, the US will hold general elections for president and vice president, as well as members of Congress. MOFA and its overseas missions will pay close attention to the elections and ensure that both parties hold a stance equally friendly to Taiwan. As the Congressional election could affect the future of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, MOFA will draft plans for each possible election outcome and further communicate with Congress after the election on related issues. In addition to engaging in traditional security and political exchanges, the two sides will continue to cooperate in such areas as women's empowerment, public health, information and communications technology, and energy through the Global Cooperation and Training Framework.

### **3.2.2. Relations with Japan**

In recent years, Taiwan and Japan have signed a number of important

agreements, including ones on investment, fisheries, and avoidance of double taxation. Bilateral legislative exchanges are frequent and close, and people-to-people exchanges have also reached new heights. In May, the two sides agreed to launch a cooperation mechanism for maritime affairs. Following related bilateral consultations, the first round of dialogue on Taiwan-Japan maritime affairs cooperation will be launched in late October. The discussions will cover such topics as fisheries cooperation, maritime emergency rescues, and oceanographic research. Our related government agencies are well prepared for these discussions. Through this meeting and on the premise of reciprocity and mutual benefit, we hope to establish a regular and efficient communication channel, as well as close cooperation, with Japan on maritime issues. As for the Okinotori matter, which has received great attention in Taiwan, the government will continue negotiating with Japan to uphold our fishermen's rights.

### **3.2.3. Relations with Europe**

In recent years, MOFA has been striving to construct a multifaceted, multilevel, and multichannel platform for important cooperation endeavors and exchanges with the European Union. Through bilateral governmental efforts, involving the participation of a range of ROC ministries, the scope of bilateral cooperation, which traditionally focuses on economic and cultural issues, has expanded to such fields as antipiracy at sea, human rights, industrial cooperation, international development, as well as sanitation and security. Our bilateral cooperation agreements with the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Austria, and Poland cover such areas as science and technology, education, and avoidance of double

taxation. Last week, we signed with Poland an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation and prevention of tax evasion. It will not only foster an environment that is more tax fair and investment friendly for the 29 Taiwanese companies that have already invested nearly US\$203 million and created around 4,600 jobs in Poland, but also spur bilateral investment and trade. In the meantime, we are promoting the signing of a Taiwan-EU bilateral investment agreement, with the aim to advance systematic cooperation through annual bilateral consultations.

#### **3.2.4. Monitoring the impact of Brexit and responding appropriately**

In June, the United Kingdom decided through referendum to exit the European Union, but it will not take effect for another two years or longer. Once achieved, in principle the UK will be untethered from EU diplomatic and security policies, enabling it to adopt a more independent diplomatic stance. Taiwan and the United Kingdom maintain close substantive exchanges and share the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. We will continue to observe the impact of Brexit on the political and economic landscape of Europe and the rest of the world. We hope to continue cooperating with the UK to maintain bilateral cooperation and exchanges with the aim to further protect democracy, freedom, and human rights.

#### **3.3. Promoting the New Southbound Policy**

In her inaugural address, President Tsai announced her New Southbound Policy, which was followed by related economic and trade strategy

guidelines, as well as related plans launched by the Executive Yuan. Therefore, MOFA has focused on strengthening mutually beneficial relations with the 18 countries comprising ASEAN members, South Asian countries, New Zealand, and Australia. Four major areas have been targeted, namely, collaboration in economic affairs, exchange of human resources, sharing of resources, and forging of regional links, so as to better foster a sense of economic community.

To swiftly obtain positive effects, we have completed several plans under the policy, such as launching a one-year trial of visa waivers to Thai and Brunei nationals on August 1 and multiple-entry visas valid between two and five years for nationals of Southeast Asian countries. On September 1, we also expanded online services to a greater number of Southeast Asian countries, and simplified visitor visa applications for tourist groups from the region, allowing them to apply online. In addition, the websites of MOFA overseas missions in the 10 ASEAN member countries are to be translated into local languages (translations have been completed for eight countries thus far: Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Myanmar, and Vietnam, including the branch in Ho Chi Minh City). The magazine *Taiwan Panorama* is now being translated into Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese, with the websites of MOFA missions in Southeast Asia linking to the online translations of the magazine.

In addition, MOFA has set up a task force to implement the New Southbound Policy and optimize the allocation of diplomatic resources. Missions in the region have been instructed to submit concrete proposals based on policy goals and their host countries' individual circumstances. Accordingly, MOFA has planned the following measures: forming links between cities in Taiwan and those in Southeast Asian countries,

encouraging mutual visits, enhancing multilateral parliamentary diplomacy, promoting the signing of bilateral economic cooperation agreements, strengthening medical and humanitarian aid, and expanding training programs.

#### **3.4. Continuing to promote participation in international organizations through pragmatic approaches**

Global issues handled by international organizations and mechanisms, such as the World Health Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Interpol, impact the well-being of the entire human race, including ROC nationals. Our greater participation in the mechanisms, meetings, and activities of international organizations would enable us to assist both others and ourselves. We will not and should not be excluded from the handling of these global concerns. Although we were not invited this year to the 39th Assembly of ICAO, our efforts to join the event earned international support, thus adding impetus to our endeavors to promote Taiwan's future involvement in international organizations. Looking ahead, the government will draw up practical and viable goals for our professional participation in international organizations based on their functions and attributes. We will also continue to maintain contact with like-minded countries and evaluate situations from both our and their perspectives in order to better convince international organizations of the critical and urgent need to include Taiwan in related discussions.

#### **3.5. Safeguarding ROC sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands**

## **and maintaining regional peace and stability**

This July, the tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague announced its unfavorable award on the ROC in the South China Sea arbitration submitted by the Philippines against mainland China. Therefore, MOFA has been producing materials to better educate the international community about the ROC's indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands and their relevant waters in accordance with international law and the law of the sea. The ROC government reiterates that it will take staunch action to safeguard the country's territory and relevant maritime rights and that the award is not legally binding on the ROC. When resolving disputes in the South China Sea, MOFA will continue to safeguard our national sovereignty and act on the principle of setting aside differences and promoting joint development. The ROC is willing to work with all parties concerned to advance peace and stability in the South China Sea and jointly preserve and develop resources in this region through negotiations conducted on an equal basis.

In the future, we will continue to maintain contact with all parties concerned so as to engage in multilateral talks, and also seek to establish coordination and cooperation mechanisms on such nontraditional security issues as marine environmental protection, scientific research, maritime crime prevention, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Together, we can maintain regional peace and stability.

## **3.6. Harnessing our humanitarian aid capabilities in our diplomatic work**

MOFA has for many years been actively promoting humanitarian

diplomacy in order to stay abreast of foreign aid trends, fulfill our responsibility as a member of the global village, and give back to the international community based on a spirit of humanitarian concern. In addition to enhancing cooperation with both local and foreign NGOs on implementing foreign aid projects, we are also continuing to coordinate with NGOs engaged in humanitarian rescue work, as well as related government agencies, with a view to establishing a Taiwan NGO international aid contact platform through which to share experience and integrate resources, as well as help both domestic and overseas NGOs carry out international humanitarian aid programs.

Over the past few years, Taiwan has not once been absent from efforts to provide emergency humanitarian aid whenever major disasters have occurred around the world, including earthquakes in Haiti, Japan, and Nepal, and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. We have helped the Marshall Islands overcome drought conditions, we have helped Belize, Guatemala, and Haiti with rebuilding after hurricanes, and we have helped our diplomatic allies in Latin America, such as Honduras and El Salvador, prevent and control the Zika virus. Similarly, to show our concern for refugees caught in the chaos of war being fought by the terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in the Middle East, MOFA has also donated items such as prefabricated houses, medical equipment, lighting, and food through international cooperation. In addition, we have been commended by both the Holy See and various bishops in recipient nations for our close cooperative partnership with the Holy See on international humanitarian aid and charity work.

Humanitarian aid is an issue that is unaffected by partisanship, one that people can easily agree on. My ministry will continue to actively promote humanitarian diplomacy work, not only to give back to the international

community, but also as a way of helping Taiwan enhance its ties with its diplomatic allies and other friendly nations, as well as expanding its international space.

### **3.7. Seeking global opportunities for Taiwanese youth to expand their horizons**

Through the joint efforts of MOFA and our representative office in Paris, Taiwan and France signed a youth working holiday agreement on July 13 that will give young people with a penchant for French culture a wonderful opportunity to visit the country and gain a more international perspective. In June, we also signed the latest iteration of a scientific cooperation agreement with the Czech Republic to encourage young scholars from both countries to participate in joint research programs, as well as to cooperate on competing for EU-sponsored programs. In addition, Israel has expressed a high degree of willingness to sign a youth working holiday agreement with Taiwan, which is especially good news since it will allow our youths to get involved in R&D and innovation programs in Israel, a country whose economy is well-known for its young start-ups. We are currently waiting for the relevant departments in Taiwan to reach a consensus before we can put pen to paper.

Moreover, MOFA is looking to transform the International Youth Ambassadors Exchange Program, which we started in 2009, by working with relevant government agencies, as well as local and foreign NGOs, to add elements involving humanitarian aid and care. This will give full play to our younger generation's strengths, allowing them to realize their dreams, while also leaving behind a favorable impression of Taiwan

around the world with their good deeds.

### **3.8. Maximizing our diplomatic resources through adjustments**

Given the ever-changing international landscape, it is common practice for foreign ministries to maximize diplomatic outcomes by evaluating the allocation of resources and, based on the foreign policy priorities of the day, making adjustments to the overall way in which their overseas missions operate. As such, we at MOFA regularly assess the set up of our overseas missions. The ministry has, on many occasions in the past, performed cost-benefit analyses, examined the way our resources are used, and merged existing missions or established new ones accordingly. Since 2002, we have opened 14 new overseas missions, while closing 13. In the process, consideration was given not only to our overall diplomatic strategy, but also to such other factors as the potential for developing political relations, economic and trade relations, service provision for Taiwanese expatriates and travelers, natural resources, the distance between overseas missions, and performance.

I understand the many concerns and criticisms that have recently been leveled at the planned merging and streamlining of our overseas missions, and want to take this opportunity to explain the situation, as is my responsibility. Given that we only have a limited foreign affairs budget, as well as resources and personnel, and given that we have to deal with an increasingly onerous and diverse range of international issues, merging some of our overseas missions is the first step in conducting a comprehensive reassessment and reallocation of our diplomatic resources. It is in no way a self-imposed limitation or random action, but rather a

practical look at the way we have our overseas missions set up, and using resources where they best serve our current policy objectives given the prevailing conditions. Once this first step is complete, we will move on to the next stage, which is to reallocate resources and personnel to missions where they are needed most, such as those in Southeast Asia.

### **3.9. Reforming training programs and the Foreign Service exams to select the best possible people to serve the nation**

The outcomes of our diplomatic work hinge largely on the quality and professional abilities of our staff. In recent years, we have continued to refine training programs for newly recruited diplomats, and have a mechanism for carefully screening for the best talent. We have also considered the specific characteristics of the different regions around the world, and are providing more training accordingly to boost foreign language competency and professional skills, as well as verbal skills and ability to elaborate on policy. We want to ensure that, from the very beginning of training, we have high-caliber people and can effectively select from among them the most suited to diplomatic work. In addition, considering the increasingly weighty nature of our work in terms of international law and international organizations, as well as the growing number of bilateral and multilateral negotiations involving international legal issues, MOFA is working with the Ministry of Examination to look at adding a section on international law to the Foreign Service Officer exams in order to be able to recruit legal professionals to our field.

### **3.10. Continuing to promote measures that can provide better**

## **consular services to the public**

Consular affairs work is the first line of contact between MOFA and the public. To continue providing the public with convenient, high quality services, MOFA has recently implemented the following measures:

### 3.10.1. Simplifying application procedures for document authentication:

Beginning June 1 this year, a new version of the ROC Document Legalization Certificate was released, while an online system was also established to provide authentication services to both local and overseas organizations. This has streamlined cross-border consular authentication procedures, and made documents issued by the ROC government more useable overseas.

### 3.10.2. Main hall expansion:

The expansion of the main hall of the consular affairs section in our Central Taiwan Office was completed on June 7. At the same time, measures were also taken to provide two separate service channels, one for people making applications and one for those picking up documents. This has significantly reduced the bottlenecks, and resulted in better service for residents of central Taiwan.

3.10.3. To improve services in the Taitung area, MOFA's Eastern Taiwan Office in Hualien sends personnel there every month to perform consular work. Not having to go to the trouble of traveling back and forth saves local residents both time and money.

Moreover, due to the limited space and consequent congestion caused by throngs of people seeking consular services in the main hall of the BOCA headquarters in the Joint Central Government Office Building in Taipei,

MOFA will obtain more space in the building to provide the public with a more convenient and comfortable environment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Diplomacy is the art of the possible. Since taking up the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have repeatedly stressed to the entire staff at MOFA that pragmatism remains the common denominator in our work, the core aim of which is to strive for our nation's best interests. As such, when formulating and implementing policy, we have to consider the nation's changing circumstances, various intrinsic factors, as well as the actual reality. While we can be positive, flexible, and forward-looking in the actions we take, we must always have our feet firmly and pragmatically planted in reality.

Diplomatic work is a long-term endeavor, especially given the difficult and highly challenging situation we currently face. Indeed, a number of our policies will not produce instant results, but rather will require our long-term attention before they start paying dividends. If we can count on having everyone's understanding and support, regardless of political affiliation, then we can come together and work as one on overcoming the various challenges and obstacles.

ROC diplomats have no right to be negative or pessimistic. They do, however, have an obligation to keep forging ahead optimistically. I have every faith that my staff at the ministry will do just that.

We will play to our strengths and work as a team to overcome the challenges that every opportunity throws up. And we will be optimistic, yet cautious, in looking to turn each and every challenge into opportunity. We will hold nothing back in our efforts to expand Taiwan's international space and safeguard our national interests, and we very much look forward to the Legislative Yuan's continued support and encouragement. Thank you!