

Remarks by Dr. Jaushieh Joseph Wu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C (Taiwan) for the “Taiwan’s Strong COVID-19 Responses” online symposium hosted by the Hudson Institute

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Good afternoon everybody.

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the Hudson Institute for holding this timely event, and for inviting me to share what Taiwan is doing against this global pandemic.

Here in Taiwan and around the world, people are closely tracking the spread of coronavirus. We know how serious it is, its rate of infection, and the unfortunate number of deaths. Near half the world is in lockdown; billions are discouraged from leaving their homes.

Taiwan is fortunate so far. Thanks to an early and active campaign to diagnose, track, isolate, and mitigate cases, the impact to our daily lives has been minor.

Although we are currently experiencing an increase in cases, the vast majority have been from overseas arrivals. And these cases have been quickly identified and placed under treatment.

Despite these successes, the situation could have been very different. We know we are vulnerable: our geographical proximity to China; a large number of Taiwanese living and working in China, including thousands in Wuhan; hundreds of weekly flights; three million visitors from China annually; and the lack of access to the World Health Organization. But we have also

learned a hard lesson from SARS in 2003 that we should rely on ourselves, as the WHO might not help Taiwan at all.

We know this is a recipe for a potential catastrophe, and we don't have the luxury to wait and see. So when our health officials saw some reports of SARS-like transmittable disease in Wuhan, they began their serious investigation and the preparation for the possible emergency. Along the way of dealing with the coming pandemic, several major steps we took seemed to be effective, and I would like to share with you here.

1. **Quick response:** we took action faster than our neighbors in the region and the rest of the world. On December 31, the same day we reached out to the WHO about this mysterious SARS-like atypical pneumonia in Wuhan, we started screening passengers on board of all flights coming from Wuhan. Prior to the first case arriving in Taiwan, we quickly activated a task force, led by our CDC officials, to monitor the situation closely, including sending two experts to Wuhan to conduct on-site investigation. Since our experts failed to obtain credible response from the Chinese officials in Wuhan, we thought something went wrong there, and we needed to arm ourselves for the war against an invisible enemy.
2. **Early deployment:** When the first case of the coronavirus did arrive on January 21, we set up the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), fully authorized by the government to do what is necessary. We enacted border control procedures to stop flights from certain areas or countries from coming in. We screen body temperature of all inbound passengers, and

outbound passengers at a later stage so that we don't export our cases. We implemented a tracking and monitoring program first for travelers from Wuhan, then for the rest of China, and now for all inbound passengers. We set up quarantine procedures, locations, and the much talked about digital fence. We also mobilize a number of taxis for the sole purpose of transporting passengers from the airports to their quarantine locations. We also planned for the production and ration of critical materials that would surely become a global problem. The government also quickly drew up a legal framework to deal with the coming crisis, especially dealing with the possible economic impact. All these were done before things turned bad on us.

3. **Transparency:** after its setup, the CECC began its daily press conference, sometimes more than once a day, to brief the public the real situation in the country and around the world, the confirmed cases found, their origin, contacts, traces, and so forth. The CECC has also been educating the public how to protect themselves. The press rounds were also used to combat disinformation, generated mostly by the Chinese. In addition, the government also acquire air time for public messages. Within a short period of time, the CECC has firmly established its authority and has gained the trust of the public. In some occasions, large public gatherings were forced to cancel, not by the government order, but by the pressure of the well-informed citizens. If anyone ask me about the difference between the Taiwan model and the Chinese communist model in fighting against COVID-19, I would say the most important factor is

transparency and honesty. We in Taiwan cannot afford to conceal or to lie, but the Chinese communists are institutionally incapable of telling the truth.

4. **Export ban, ration, and rapid increase of production on critical supplies:** when the government noticed a wave of procurement by the Chinese on critical medical supplies, not only in Taiwan but also in other countries, we quickly issued an export ban. At the same time, we also began a massive increase of production of surgical masks as well as sanitizing alcohol. In addition, we started a ration on face mask, putting it at a very affordable price, under 17 cents per piece, with virtually every citizen being able to buy with their National Health Insurance card. And for resident foreigners in Taiwan, they can use their residence card to buy at the same price. For the resident diplomats and their dependents, our ministry is responsible for distributing them free with the same amount as the ration for our own citizens.
5. **Whole-of-government approach:** we knew very well that outbreaks would have economic, international, and other impacts, as we learned from SARS in 2003. The CECC has taken in many ministries to make joint decisions, including border control, putting certain countries on higher alert, monitoring international situation, engaging in international cooperation, repatriation of citizens from China or elsewhere, military personnel involving in initial production of critical materials, as well as disinfection of public area, rapid increase of critical material supplies, coming up with financial packages to support the businesses that are impacted, combating

disinformation, monitoring the mass transportation and stations, catching those who violated the quarantine orders, etc. The arrangement brought the whole government together under the CECC command, which has the full backing of the president and the premier. I think I am rather senior among my peers in the cabinet, but when the commander speaks, I can only say: Yes, Sir.

6. **Rearrangement of medical institutions to meet the emergency requirement:** We designed a system to quickly streamline testing, diagnose, and treatment. We have designated over 160 testing facilities around the country, and this rapidly increase our capacity to do the testing. From these facilities, confirmed cases would either be sent to one of 134 medical facilities for milder cases, or 50 large regional centers for more severe cases. This system allowed us to quickly isolate patients based on their severity, as well as prioritize medical personnel and equipment.
7. **Preventive measures of in-hospital outbreaks:** again, this is a hard lesson we learned in 2003 when we saw hospitals locked down with a traumatic image. We quickly reactivated the emergency procedures for patients entering hospitals—patients with fever would have a separate route to be screened first, and possibly tested. More importantly, hospitals were clearly demarcated internally so that medical personnel and staff in different wards and floors do not interact. So if there is an outbreak, it would be limited to a ward, or a floor at most, and the rest of the hospital will remain operational. We also fully understand that medical personnel are absolutely critical in this

fight, but at the same time they are also vulnerable by standing on the frontline. We want to make certain their personal protection gears are stocked to sufficiency for a possible outbreak—i.e., they can remain operational under extreme conditions of hospital lockdown. We won't let them go to war without giving them what they need to protect themselves.

8. **Contact tracing:** Among all the measures we took, I would like to point out that contact tracing through the use of technology is quite effective. We are able to identify potential cases by tracing past contacts, sometimes numbered at hundreds, of the cases that were tested positive. By cross-referencing health records and personal travel histories, the government has been able to quickly identify, put under quarantine, and test people that had been in contact with a confirmed case. Without the use of tracing technology, the workload for our CECC team would have been insurmountable. At this point, I would also like to point out that our national health insurance, which has more than 99% of coverage, is the key to the success of ration of critical material and tracing of contacts.

Ladies and gentlemen, Taiwan is a democracy. We recognize that while the above actions may be effective, they must also be undertaken carefully and in proportion to the threat we face. I would like to emphasize there must be accountability and full public support for these actions. That is the reason for the daily

briefing to disclose information about the actions we have taken; and this has been well-received by the public.

It is important to note that we continue to face information warfare waged by the other side of the Taiwan Strait. Over the past few months, we have seen Beijing engage in a large-scale, coordinated campaign to mislead our public on the disease and to undermine their trust in the government. From conspiracy theories about the origins of the coronavirus to fabricated government proclamations, China has clearly shown that they do not want this crisis to go to waste. I think the United States these days is also having a small dose of what we have encountered in Taiwan for some time.

Whatever China has tried to do, Taiwan's experience shows that for free and open democracies, there is a better path forward in dealing with the outbreak. As Foreign Minister, one of my priorities is to share the "Taiwan model" with the international community, and with this as a basis, strengthen existing partnerships with the like-minded countries.

Last month, I was pleased to have issued a joint statement between Taiwan and the US to establish a new partnership to fight together against COVID-19. As part of this partnership, we are committed to the exchange of critical medical supplies and on the development and production of vaccines, medicines, and testing kits.

We also seek to replicate this partnership with other like-minded countries. We are now engaging in technical consultations with partners in Europe. In addition, we are also working to make

available key medical supplies, especially to the medical personnel on the frontline, in the hardest hit countries. The medical masks are arriving in Europe and the US shortly.

We will continue to seek participation in the WHO. We believe that having undertaken successful actions to mitigate the coronavirus, we have a lot to share with the international community. Given that pandemics recognize no borders and make no distinctions between nationalities, we think it is irresponsible for the WHO to continue to limit Taiwan's participation. We have noted that while we have made some progress, significant hurdles remain.

One area that is very important for us is information exchange. Without timely access to critical information about the coronavirus, Taiwan risks becoming a gap in the global health system, undermining the very purpose of the WHO's existence. And this also puts at risk everything we have worked so hard to accomplish, both in Taiwan and together with other like-minded countries.

Despite our difficulties with the WHO, we are moving ahead with experience sharing at a regional level. Over the past five years, the Taiwan-U.S. Global Cooperation and Training Framework, or GCTF, has been a successful platform to conduct discussions and exchanges with countries in the Indo-Pacific. We are working to hold a workshop on the coronavirus to exchange experiences and the best practices. I believe this event will be well attended.

Over the past few years, we have kept our messaging on Taiwan's international participation simple: "Taiwan can help." Our robust

response to the coronavirus outbreak, the actions we have taken, and the model we are committed to sharing, all of this shows that Taiwan **can** help. And we are willing to do so.

The most dangerous narrative to arise out of this global pandemic, seems to me, are the talking points China is pushing around the world: that only authoritarian regimes have the resources and capabilities to deal with the problem. And while the outbreak will subside eventually, my concern is that this narrative may persist. This narrative only serves one purpose: to further undermine free and open societies from around the world.

Taiwan is a counterweight to this narrative. We prove that there is a better way forward. The more we can amplify Taiwan's story – our experiences in so far successfully managing the crisis – the more difficult it is for authoritarian regimes to promote their alternative vision. For that I am grateful for the Hudson Institute for giving me this opportunity.

Thank you.