



## **Excluded but Still Able and Willing: Taiwan's Story in the Pandemic**

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Taiwan, Republic of China, April 2020

Widely recognized by the international community, Taiwan's achievements in public health have helped the central and local governments in Taiwan cope with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Yet, very few people know Taiwan, whose official title is the Republic of China (ROC, founded by the KMT), has been excluded from the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1972.

Fortunately, despite being without direct participation in and information from the WHO, some important factors have contributed to the success of Taiwan in combating the epidemic.

First, as mentioned before, Taiwan has a high-quality public health capacity. After the hit of SARS in 2003, Taiwan established standard operating procedures (SOPs) to manage the spread of the virus, from the central government agencies to local ones. A few hospitals designated by region have been preparing necessary logistics for medical treatment of patients. Drills are performed every year to familiarize medical staff with the said SOPs. Besides, the greater availability and accessibility of medical healthcare services in Taiwan also explain why Taiwan has been able to better respond in such a short period of time when the new virus emerged. These medical healthcare services are part of the National Health Insurance – a world-renowned, compulsory social insurance program instituted by the KMT government back in 1995.

Second, also because of SARS, when the messages from the government are cautionary, Taiwan has a number of highly-alerted people who want to protect themselves during an epidemic by always wearing facial masks in public places. After the first few confirmed cases were found in Taiwan, quite a few companies, restaurants, and residential communities have exercised a great deal of caution by implementing hygienic measures.

Last, the sour relationship between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait since the ruling party (DPP) came to power in mid-2016 has largely reduced the number of tourists from mainland China where the COVID-19 was first discovered. Border control measures were adopted by the DPP government immediately after the new virus spread in mainland China. As a result, the impact of the new virus on Taiwan has been limited.

Like most of the countries in the world, Taiwan's economy has been affected to a certain extent during the pandemic. What is worse is that mainland China and Hong Kong, which



account for about 41% of Taiwan’s total exports last year, has been down economically over the COVID-19 pandemic. One can foresee an evident economic recession during and after the pandemic.

Seeing the DPP government wants to disseminate discount coupons after the pandemic, the KMT is proposing that the government send all Taiwanese money in cash to aid the pandemic-hit economy, as many other countries have done or prepared to do, just like the measures carried out by the US, the UK, Japan, Singapore, and many others. The KMT’s call for “cash over coupons” excludes the rich. The KMT believes that cash subsidies are more cost-effective and more directly providing economic relief.

A responsible opposition at this time of a national threat, the KMT vows to monitor closely and respond sensibly to any precautionary measures by the DPP government that may have infringed civil liberties and other basic human rights.

A responsible opposition at this time of a mounting difficulty, the KMT firmly believes that “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health” – as stipulated in the WHO Charter – can be better realized by the participation of Taiwan’s population of 23 million. The zealous desire of the people of Taiwan to participate in and contribute to the WHO should be respected and supported by the Beijing authorities and the rest of the world. Taiwan needs the WHO just as much as the WHO needs Taiwan in fighting coronavirus and future epidemics.