



CHEN SHIH-CHUNG

## China can't be allowed to block Taiwan from WHO

Chen Shih-chung

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**I**n the 17 years since it was hit hard by Sars, Taiwan has been ready for the threat of an emerging infectious disease. As a result, when information about an outbreak of a novel form of pneumonia in China was first confirmed on December 31 last year, Taiwan began implementing quarantine of direct flights from Wuhan on the same day. On January 2, the country established a response team for the disease, and on January 20 launched the Central Epidemic Command Centre (CECC) to integrate resources from various ministries in order to contain the epidemic.

Early intervention by the government got the situation under control. Despite its proximity to China, Taiwan has had only 429 confirmed cases, 55 of which have been indigenous, and six deaths as of Monday this week.

There is now an e-quarantine entry system to the country, by which passengers fill in health information via mobile phone. This is then connected to the community care support management system, allowing government agencies to provide

care and medical assistance. Individuals' travel history is stored on a national health insurance card to alert physicians to possible cases and prevent community transmission.

For those undergoing home quarantine or isolation, the government is working with telecom operators to allow GPS tracking of their locations, with fines issued to violators. Taiwan has also increased laboratory testing capacity, expanded the scope of its surveillance, and retested people with higher risk who previously tested negative. A tiered system of testing has been created, involving 50 regional hospitals and medical centres and 167 community hospitals and clinics.

The export of surgical masks was banned on January 24, since when domestic mask production has expanded. There is a name-based rationing system for mask purchases and a system that allows people to order online and pick up masks at convenience stores. These measures have helped us achieve effective allocation of limited resources

A crisis anywhere quickly becomes a problem everywhere in today's globalised world. Taiwan, though not a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO), has made efforts to join the global fight against the virus. Beginning in April, it has donated over 10 million medical face masks to countries around the world, including Britain.

To ensure that global health is not imperilled by a lack of communication and transparency, Taiwan has abided by the International Health Regulations (2005) in notifying the WHO of confirmed Covid-19 cases and communicated with countries including the UK, as well as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, sharing information on confirmed cases. Taiwan has also uploaded the genetic sequence of Covid-19 to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data.

Given all that the country could share with the world, be it pandemic prevention experience, rapid testing capacity,

vaccines and drug R&D, it is regrettable Taiwan has long been excluded from the WHO due to pressure from China.

If it is indeed the WHO's mission to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for every human being, then the WHO needs Taiwan. just as Taiwan needs the WHO. We hope that after this pandemic slows down, the WHO will truly understand that infectious diseases know no borders, and it should not neglect or underestimate any contributions that a nation can make to global health security.

Taiwan thanks British parliamentarians who have called for Taiwan's participation in the WHO, and for recognising the vital role it can play in the fight for global health. We urge the WHO to include Taiwan in all of its meetings, mechanisms and activities, ensuring its 23 million people of the fundamental human right to health as stipulated in the WHO constitution. Echoing the mantra of the United Nations' 2030 sustainable development goals, no one should be left behind.

### Dr Chen Shih-chung is Taiwan's minister of health and welfare

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**Nemo** 22 HOURS AGO

Now the headline says "China can't be allowed to block Taiwan from WHO". Who can disallow China? China has the Veto vote in UNSC. That is the end of that story. Not that I am happy about that.