**Taiwan Must Turn Over a New Leaf in International Relations 2016**

By Linda Gail Arrigo\*

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Taiwanese have been uninformed about the evils perpetrated by the Republic of China over past decades in international dealings, i.e. alliances with dictatorships sharing its paranoid anti-communist Cold War mentality. These include alliance with the previous white apartheid government of South Africa; and complicity in supporting and training reactionary death squads in Central America. Notably, Roberto D’Aubuisson, founder of the right-wing ARENA party in El Salvador and documented to have ordered the March 1980 assassination of Bishop Romero, was seven times the guest of the Political Warfare College in Peitou (see *Inside the League*, 1986, by Anderson and Anderson). Less lethal but still damaging to international reputation, Taiwan’s more recent money diplomacy with small Pacific islands has been disparaged by Australian commentators.

Transitional justice on the international front must delve into and acknowledge this corrosive history in Taiwan’s international relations. What better way for the incoming Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) administration to distinguish itself from the martial law heritage of the Chinese settler regime, and frame its international image as the new embodiment of democracy in Taiwan?

The eight years of the Chen Shui-bian presidency did not much alter the mindset and stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It still upheld the untenable and self-isolating One China principle, i.e. in preemptively cutting relations with Nauru in July 2002. News commentators and discussion all over the world calls Taiwan just “Taiwan”. So what use is there in maintaining relations with 3% of the world’s population under the fiction of “the Republic of China”? Undoubtedly, it provides inflated salaries and expense budgets for MOFA staff. (We can however give MOFA some credit for funding and providing informational services for NGO international activities since the 1990’s.) Now, with an overwhelming mandate from the public that rejected the KMT’s pandering to China, and also a legislative majority, the Tsai administration has a responsibility to take control of MOFA and set a new direction.

But reports from several sources are that the incoming administration plans to appoint the previous administration’s representative to Washington and Canada and Australia, a MOFA officer who began his career in the martial law period, as the new head of MOFA. Whatever the merits of the individual, this cannot but provoke astonishment and even outrage. MOFA has consistently upheld the “One China” position, no matter how anachronistic or damaging to Taiwan. This massively sends the wrong message to the rest of the world as well. The people of Taiwan have spoken for and in fact enacted their own sovereignty in electing Tsai Ing-wen, even if the country internally still carries the moniker “the Republic of China” in its Constitution. But the Kuomintang has denied and suppressed the sovereignty of the people of Taiwan, and instead recognizes the sovereignty of China over Taiwan. Far from moving towards transitional justice, appointing a KMT official to head MOFA could be construed to be a betrayal of the founding ideals of the Democratic Progressive Party, ideals for which many spent years in prison, and perhaps a frustration of the hopes of the electorate as well. What justification can be given for this?

I can attest that several prominent Taiwanese with experience in foreign relations substantially concur with my views; I hope that they will speak for themselves.

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Note: On Friday April 15 it was confirmed that David Lee (李大維) will be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs for the incoming Tsai administration.