

Taiwan, Protesting local farmers get global boost

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La Via Campesina (LVC) — a global alliance of 150 farming rights groups — yesterday voiced their support for Taiwanese farmers who are struggling against forced government land seizures and said it would deliver letters to the Taiwanese government to protest the land-grabs.

“La via campesina, viva. La via campesina, viva. (long live the peasant’s way)” farmers and activists from Taiwan, Indonesia and South Korea chanted at a news event in Taipei to show solidarity in the campaign to defend farmers’ rights.

“Struggles by small-scale farmers to defend their farmland is very common around the world; however, such struggles are often stigmatized and the people involved ... are often sanctioned by law,” said Achmad Yakub, LVC’s youth coordinator for Southeast Asia. “This is why farmers around the world must stand together in solidarity.”

“We would ask all 150 farming rights groups under the LVC to send letters to the government of Taiwan to protest what has been happening to Taiwanese farmers in recent years,” Yakub said.

Campaigners and farmers have been angered by projects in which agricultural land has been commandeered to make way for industrial facilities and science parks, as well as diverting water from irrigation systems for industrial use.

An LVC delegation, on a visit to Taiwan since Friday, has met various farming communities affected by land or water seizures in Yilan, Hsinchu, Miaoli and Changhua counties, in addition to New Taipei City (新北市) and Greater Kaohsiung.

Protest letter-writing campaigns have been effective in slowing or stopping land seizures in Indonesia and the Philippines, said Yakub “but I don’t know if it would work with the Taiwanese government,” triggering a round of laughter.

However, the activist said that there’s always hope, adding that he was pleased by the effectiveness of a campaign to halt a land seizure in Houlong Township’s (後龍鎮) Wanbao Borough (萬寶里), where the Miaoli County Government had planned to build a science park. The plan was eventually shelved by the central government after a yearslong protests by local farmers who refused to give up their farmland.

Haesook Kim, LVC regional secretary for Southeast Asia, said that protecting farmers is in the national interest at a time when food crises pose a constant threat.

Taiwan Farmers Union chairman Liu Ching-chang (劉清昌), who is a farmer in Jhudong Township (竹東鎮), Hsinchu County, and whose farmland is under threat from forced seizure, thanked the LVC for its support on behalf of all farmers affected by land seizures.

“It’s truly important for farmers around the world to stand in solidarity, to fight against the coalition of governments and big corporations,” he said.

Loa Iok-sin

P.S.

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