

Congress of the United States**Washington, DC 20515**

December 19, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

We are writing to ask that the State Department cease its repeated efforts to affect the outcome of the upcoming elections in Taiwan, and specifically, the outcome of the planned referendum on membership in the United Nations. Your department has already made its objections to the referendum quite clear, and we are concerned that continued public criticism of the measure by U.S. officials will only contribute to the perception that the U.S. is playing political favorites in Taiwan.

Administration condemnations of the referendum have been numerous and public. In June, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack publicly urged people to reject the proposed U.N referendum. In August, John Negroponte arranged to appear on a Chinese television station to express U.S. opposition to the plebiscite, dangerously mischaracterizing it as "a step toward a declaration of independence." A few days later, a National Security Council spokesman also blasted the referendum. Our AIT director in Taipei, Stephen Young has repeatedly criticized the proposal. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian affairs suggested that the "DPP referendum" is "inconsistent with President Chen's inaugural pledges" (disregarding the fact that President Chen's pledges were contingent on China not threatening to use force against the island). And just a few days ago, Raymond Burghardt publicly panned the upcoming vote as an obstacle to "develop[ing] relations across the Taiwan Strait."

One or two public statements would be quite sufficient to convey the Administration's position to Taiwan's elected officials on this matter. It is not necessary to continue dispatching an endless parade of U.S. officials to denounce and attack the proposal over a six month stretch while parroting the terminology used by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Doing so is not just unseemly, it is totally unnecessary. Given the vibrant debate on the issue inside Taiwan and the widely varying opinions on the wisdom and efficacy of the referendum among Taiwan's numerous political parties, the Department's sustained interference will do little more than contribute to what has already become a troubling – and unfortunately quite understandable – perception in Taiwan that the U.S. government is choosing sides in their elections.