

# Tsai Ing-Wen, Apology To Indigenous Peoples,” August 1, 2016

President Tsai spoke in Taipei.

## **August 1, 2016**

Taipei, Aug. 1 (CNA) President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Monday issued a formal apology on behalf of the government to Taiwan's indigenous people for the discrimination and neglect they suffered over the past 400 years. The following is the full text of her apology:

On this day 22 years ago, the term "shanbao" (mountain people) in the Additional Articles of our Constitution was replaced with the proper name: "indigenous people". This correction not only did away with a discriminatory term, but also highlighted the status of indigenous peoples as Taiwan's "original owners".

From this basis, today, we are taking another step forward. To all indigenous peoples of Taiwan: On behalf of the government, I express to you our deepest apology. For the four centuries of pain and mistreatment you have endured, I apologize to you on behalf of the government.

I know that even now, there are some around us who see no need to apologize. But that is the most important reason why I am representing the government to issue this apology today. To see what was unfair in the past as a matter of course, or to treat the pain of other ethnic peoples as an unavoidable part of human development, this is the first mindset that we, standing here today, resolve to change and overturn.

Let me put in simple terms why we are apologizing to the indigenous peoples. Four hundred years ago, there were already people living in Taiwan. These first inhabitants lived their lives and had their own languages, cultures, customs, and domains. But then, without their consent, another group of people arrived on these shores, and in the course of history, took everything from the first inhabitants who, on the land they have known most intimately, became displaced, foreign, non-mainstream, and marginalized.

The success of one ethnic people can be built on the suffering of another. Unless we deny that we are a country of justice, we must face up to this history. We must tell the truth. And then, most importantly, the government must genuinely reflect on this past. This is why I stand here today.

There is a book called "The General History of Taiwan" published in 1920. In its foreword are these words: "Taiwan had no history. The Dutch pioneered it, the Koxinga Kingdom built it, and the Qing Empire managed it." This is a typical Han view of history. The truth is that indigenous peoples have been here for thousands of years, with rich culture and wisdom that have been passed down through generations. But we only know to write history from the perspective of the dominant. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

The Dutch and the Koxinga Kingdom massacred and exploited the Pingpu ethnic group. The Qing Empire presided over bloody confrontations and suppression. Colonial Japan put in place comprehensive savage policies. And the post-war ROC government undertook assimilation policies. For 400 years, every regime that has come to Taiwan has brutally violated the rights of indigenous peoples through armed invasion and land seizure. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

Indigenous peoples maintain tribal order according to traditional customs, and ecological balance according to traditional wisdom. But in the process that modern state institutions had been built, indigenous peoples lost the right to steer their own course and govern their own affairs. The fabric of traditional societies was torn apart, and the collective rights of peoples were not recognized. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

Indigenous peoples had their own languages. However, with Japanese rule aiming to assimilate and turn all into imperial subjects, and with the ROC government banning tribal languages after 1945, indigenous peoples' languages suffered great losses. Most Pingpu languages have disappeared. Successive governments have been negligent in the protection of indigenous cultures. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

Without the knowledge of the Yami tribe, the government stored nuclear waste on Orchid Island. Tribe members on the island had to suffer the negative consequences. For this, I apologize to the Yami people on behalf of the government.

Ever since outsiders began arriving in Taiwan, the Pingpu ethnic group on the western plains have borne the brunt of the impact. One ruling power after another eroded the individual and collective identities of the Pingpu ethnic group. For this, I apologize to the Pingpu ethnic group on behalf of the government.

After the democratic transition, the country began to respond to the appeals of indigenous movements. The government made certain promises and efforts. Today, we have an Indigenous Peoples Basic Law that is quite advanced. However, government agencies have not given sufficient weight to this law. Our actions have not been fast enough, comprehensive enough or sound enough. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

Taiwan is known as a culturally diverse society. But even today, indicators on health, education, economic livelihood, political participation and more still show gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, stereotypes and even discrimination against indigenous peoples have not gone away. The government has not done enough, so indigenous peoples have suffered pain and frustration unknown to other ethnic peoples. For this, I apologize to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

Our efforts have fallen short, and succeeding generations have been blind to this inadequacy. Because of this, your hardship has continued to this day. For this we are truly sorry.

Today's apology is long overdue, but it is a beginning. I do not expect any one speech or phrase of apology to wipe away four centuries of pain and suffering by the indigenous peoples. But I do hope with all my heart that today's apology will set this country and all its people on the path towards reconciliation.

Please allow me to shed light on this occasion with a piece of indigenous wisdom. In the Atayal language, truth is called "Balay", and reconciliation is called "Sbalay", so you simply add an "S" to "Balay". Truth and reconciliation are in fact two related concepts. In other words, only by facing the truth sincerely can reconciliation be attained.

In indigenous cultures, when a tribe member has offended another and intends to reconcile, an elder brings together the offender and the offended – not to produce a direct apology, but to allow each side to frankly share their inner journeys. When this truth-telling concludes, the elder calls for everyone to drink together, so that what is past is truly past. This is "Sbalay".

I hope today's occasion can be a "Sbalay" between the government and the indigenous peoples. I have spoken of past mistakes and truths the best I can, with nothing held back. In a moment, our indigenous friends will speak. I do not dare ask you to forgive, here and now. But I sincerely ask you to sustain the hope that past wrongs will not be repeated, and that one day, this country can see true reconciliation.

Today is only a beginning. The duty for reconciliation lies not with the indigenous peoples and the Pingpu ethnic group, but with the government. I know that words of apology alone are not enough. What we actually do for the indigenous peoples will decide whether reconciliation succeeds or stumbles.

Therefore, I am here to announce that we are setting up an Indigenous Historical Justice and Transitional Justice Commission under the Presidential Office. As the head of state, I will serve as convener and work hand in hand with tribal representatives to pursue historical justice. We will also discuss, on the basis of equality, the future policy direction of this country.

I want to stress that this commission places the greatest importance on equality between the country and the indigenous peoples. The election of tribal representatives, including for the Pingpu ethnic group, will take as basis the consensus of peoples and tribes. This commission will serve as a mechanism for collective decision-making by indigenous peoples, and will ensure that the voices of tribe members find true expression.

In addition, I will request that our Executive Yuan convene regularly the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law Promotion Committee, and use the Yuan's authority to coordinate and handle matters related to any consensus reached by the above-mentioned commission. These matters include the following: to retrieve historical memories, to promote indigenous self-government, to seek fair economic development, to ensure continuation of culture and education, to safeguard indigenous health, and to protect the rights of urban indigenous peoples, etc.

Where modern laws and indigenous traditional cultures are at odds, we will set up an Indigenous Legal Service Center with a high degree of cultural sensitivity, to reduce through institutional design the growing clashes between indigenous customs and modern laws.

I will ask the relevant agencies to immediately pull together cases in which indigenous community members have been indicted or sentenced for hunting, where the hunting was done in accordance with traditional customs, on traditional lands, and for non-transactional needs, and where the animals hunted were not protected by conservation laws. For such cases we will deliberate solutions.

I will also direct relevant agencies to present an investigative report on the decision-making process of nuclear waste storage on Orchid Island. Before finding a permanent solution for the nuclear waste, we will provide the Yami tribe appropriate compensation.

At the same time, under the principle of respecting the Pingpu ethnic group's self-identity, and recognizing their identity, we will examine relevant laws before September 30 of this year, so that Pingpu ethnic group identity will receive the rights and status it deserves.

On November 1 of this year, we will begin to delineate and announce indigenous traditional territories and lands. The system of tribal public corporation is already in place. In the future, the ideals of indigenous self-government will be realized step by step. We will step up the pace and submit for legislative deliberation three laws of great importance to indigenous peoples: the Indigenous Peoples Self-Government Law, the Indigenous Peoples Land and Sea Areas Law, and the Indigenous Languages Development Law.

Later this afternoon, we will convene a national indigenous peoples administrative meeting. In that meeting, the government will elaborate on the policies. On every August 1 to come, the Executive Yuan will report to the indigenous peoples our progress on restoring historical justice and transitional justice. To implement the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, to serve indigenous historical justice, and to lay the foundation for indigenous self-government – these are the three major goals for the government's policy towards indigenous peoples.

To all of our indigenous friends here and watching on TV and online: I invite you to stand witness. I invite you not to endorse, but to oversee. Please keep pressure on the government and right its course where necessary, so that it will realize its commitments and right historical wrongs.

I want to thank all of our indigenous friends. You remind everyone in this country that there is irreplaceable value in the land we tread on and the traditions we inherit. This value deserves dignity.

In the future, we will push for policies to ensure that succeeding generations of indigenous tribes and all ethnic peoples in Taiwan never lose their languages and memories, that they are never separated from their cultural traditions, and that never again are they lost in a land of their own.

I call upon our entire society to come together and get to know our history, get to know our land, and get to know the cultures of our many ethnic peoples. Let us work towards reconciliation, a shared existence and shared prosperity, and a new future for Taiwan.

I call upon all citizens to seize the opportunities offered by this day – to join together, work hard, and build a country of justice, a country of true diversity and equality.

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