



Overseas Volunteers and the Diplomatic Alternative Service

Civilian-based Diplomacy

Civilian-based diplomacy is both an attitude, with which Taiwan accords itself with international trends, and a method, which the nation employs as it widens its cooperation with partner nations worldwide. The goals of civilian-based diplomacy, quite simply, are to tap into the strengths of Taiwan's government and private sector resources in order to deepen the value and broaden the scope of the nation's cooperative international activities.

As an attitude, civilian-based diplomacy emerges from what has perhaps been the single most influential worldwide trend since the end of the Cold War: democratization. Democracy, by definition, includes increased civilian participation in a nation's affairs, and government respect for and obeisance to popular opinion in state matters. It is these three principles—democracy, civilian sector participation, and respect for public opinion, “the three principles of the people”—that guide Taiwan's international cooperation activities. In terms of democracy, Taiwan is firmly committed to using its own democratic experience and its ties to international human rights and democratic institutions to help create an international environment in which peace and democracy thrive. The principle of civilian participation means the nation will draw on the human resources of its private sector to achieve lasting and authentic results in its international coopera-

tion efforts. Finally, the principle of respect for public opinion means that Taiwan's government will maintain open communication with the nation's people, thus giving the public a strong voice in cooperative diplomatic policies.

As a method, civilian-based diplomacy comes into its own, and has produced concrete results that have benefited all of the countries Taiwan cooperates with, and strengthened the nation's technical and medical missions in those countries. The growing scope and needs of this international cooperation network require continual infusions of skilled human resources in order to sustain beneficial efforts. The two principal, practical constituents of Taiwanese civilian-based diplomacy—overseas volunteers and the Diplomatic Alternative Service—are doing much to alleviate concern in this respect, and providing other important benefits as well. ICDF volunteers have been bolstering overseas technical and medical missions with energy and new skills for many years. The ICDF has come to depend on the infusions of talent that its groups of volunteers provide annually. The Diplomatic Alternative Service, which allows Taiwanese conscripts to assist in ICDF overseas technical and medical missions, is a new program, which formally got under way in 2001. Both of these programs amply illustrate the international reach, aims and accomplishments of Taiwan's civilian-based diplomacy. They are

Figure 1. Overseas Volunteers Host Regions: 1996-2001

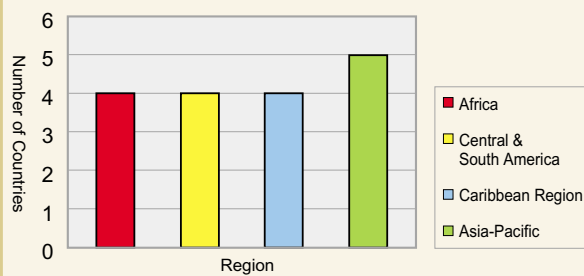
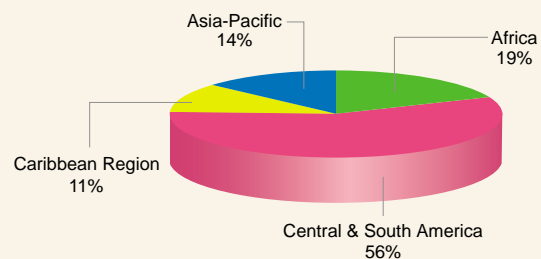


Figure 2. Overseas Volunteers Personnel: 1996-2001



not only injecting fresh enthusiasm and talent into the nation's technical and medical missions, but enlarging and refining its overall diplomatic posture as well.

ICDF Volunteers

2001 was a good year for volunteers worldwide, and those in Taiwan in particular. The UN began the year by naming 2001 "International Year of Volunteers." Then, in February, a team of Taiwanese volunteers attended the 16th World Volunteer Convention in Amsterdam. Representatives from more than 100 nations applauded the nation's volunteer spirit and expressed keen interest in Taiwan's Volunteer Service Act. Additionally, President Chen Shui-bian kept his focus trained on his "Volunteer Taiwan" vision, which he had first described in his inaugural address in May 2000, when he said "the driving force for economic development and societal progress comes from the people," and "with the spirit of a 'volunteer Taiwan,' Taiwan's new family will stand up resolutely once again."

The ICDF enthusiastically embraces Chen's vision. Indeed, the ICDF has a significant and growing role in encouraging altruistic Taiwanese citizens to volunteer in economic and social development work in nations worldwide. Since its founding, volunteers under the ICDF banner have contributed their skills and energy to many of the nations the ICDF cooperates with,

including Swaziland, Honduras, Costa Rica, Malawi, Panama, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Grenada, Fiji, Senegal, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands, São Tomé and Príncipe, Nicaragua and Myanmar. Basing its approach on America's venerable Peace Corps, the first team of overseas volunteers was sent to the Kingdom of Swaziland to perform consulting and assistance services in 1996. This group paved the way for greater Taiwanese international volunteer involvement, and to date the ICDF has trained and dispatched 72 volunteers—including the most recent group of 14 in fall 2001—who have provided assistance in disaster relief, language instruction and other subjects, computer usage, vocational training, medicine and public health, small business management consulting, rural community development, and agricultural extension. Volunteers are stationed in developing nations with which Taiwan has formal diplomatic relations, and developing nations that do not formally recognize Taiwan, but which are interested in cooperative economic development and improved bilateral ties. Apart from giving the host nations urgently needed assistance, the volunteers also gain valuable life and work experience. Their interaction with their fellows in host countries facilitates mutual understanding, fosters lasting relationships, and ultimately strengthens sincere international friendships.



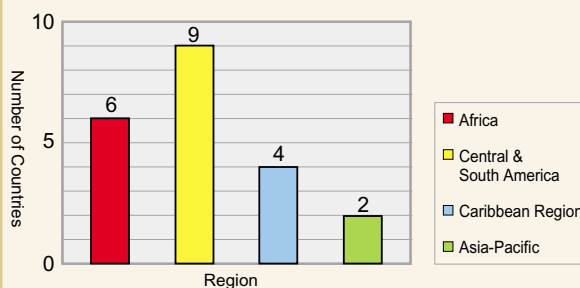
To ensure professionalism, ICDF volunteers receive at least three months of intensive training before they are dispatched overseas. Training covers a wide range of subjects, including language development, specialized professional subjects, the volunteer spirit and ideals, host country expectations, survival and first aid techniques, and mental preparation. Further instruction is held in host countries, where volunteers receive thorough orientation on the culture and traditions of the host country, and intensive language instruction from native speakers.

Volunteers serve for two years, assisting in technical and medical missions, and working at the grassroots level of community development. They not only bring Taiwan's practical economic development experience to nations around the world, but also participate in rich cultural exchange, bringing glimpses of Chinese culture to faraway locales, and themselves absorbing and learning from the new cultures they are volunteering in. In addition to these attributes, dispatching volunteers around the globe provides a solid foundation for a new generation of technical and medical mission personnel, and even personnel for Taiwan's diplomatic corps. Please see the figures 1-2, "Overseas Volunteers Host Nations" and "Overseas Volunteers Personnel" for additional information about ICDF overseas volunteers.

Diplomatic Alternative Service

Taiwan's civilian-based diplomacy has found another concrete expression in the recently founded Diplomatic Alternative Service program. Diplomatic Alternative Service represents a concerted effort by the Taiwanese government to direct the energies of the nation's citizens into the fulfillment of civilian-based diplomacy ideals. The Diplomatic Alternative Service first took shape when MOFA drafted the Overseas Cooperation Service Conscription Proposal in 1996. With the backing of MOFA and the Ministry of the Interior's Department of Conscription, the Overseas Service Conscription Proposal was sent to the Executive Yuan for review in July 2000. Initially, the proposal was not approved, but during his tour of technical and medical mission facilities in Central and South America and Africa in August 2000, President Chen Shui-bian saw firsthand the potential of

Figure 3. Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruit Host Regions, 2001



- ① Ceremony for the ICDF Volunteers and Diplomatic Alternative Service program
- ② ICDF volunteers
- ③ Diplomatic Alternative Service program recruits learn emergency rescue techniques



a shortage of human resources at the missions, and a lack of younger personnel. To ensure the continuity of mission operations, President Chen announced on August 28, 2000 that he would devote his full efforts to promoting a Diplomatic Alternative Service. In response, MOFA redoubled its efforts, and lawmakers approved the Diplomatic Alternative Service on October 23, 2000.

The first recruits in the Diplomatic Alternative Service program were selected based on their skills in agricultural technology, hydraulic engineering, medicine, vocational training and computer science. While the program was originally slated to have 35 recruits, the number was increased to 40 because of enthusiastic response. After a rigorous screening process, 37 Diplomatic Alternative Service recruits were selected to serve in the program early in 2001. MOFA assigned the ICDF the tasks of planning and

implementing professional and language training for the program. After the recruits received basic training, the ICDF assumed control and gave them 12 weeks of specialized professional training (the two most important subjects were agricultural science and medicine), foreign language instruction (recruits variously studied English, Spanish, French and Portuguese), and academic work in diplomatic affairs and international cooperation. These recruits were dispatched to 21 friendly nations in November 2001 to perform services according to their areas of expertise. See figures 3-5, “Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruit Host Nations,” “Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruits,” and “Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruit Areas of Specialization” for additional information about recruits and this program.

The services of this highly-qualified group of young men will add fresh vigor and professionalism to Taiwan’s technical

Figure 4. Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruits, 2001

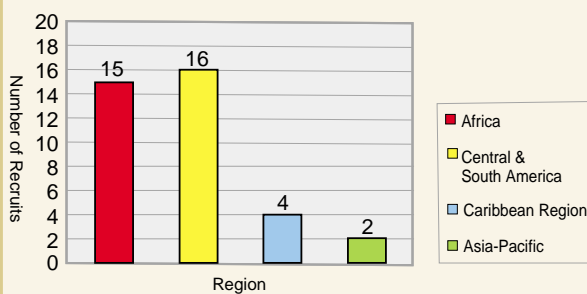
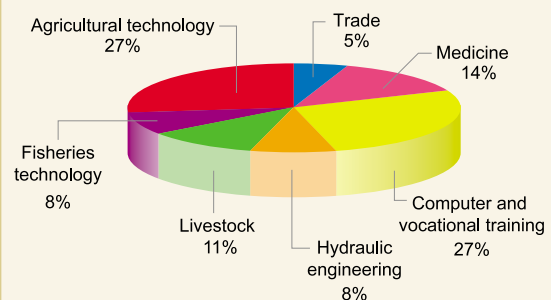


Figure 5. Diplomatic Alternative Service Recruit Areas of Specialization





missions, and as they gain experience it is hoped that many will continue to work in missions, “accepting the torch” from the older generation of technical and medical personnel. In addition to these rewards, these young recruits now serving as Taiwan’s “grassroots ambassadors” will in the future be given priority when foreign service specialist examinations are given in Taiwan. Diplomatic Alternative Service members will thus not only improve Taiwan’s cooperation work now, but in the future they may strengthen the nation’s diplomatic corps. Philip Lo, 23, a Diplomatic Alternative Service member who now works in the medical mission in Mzuzu, Malawi, made a comment before he began his service that epitomized the aims of these young men and this program. Looking toward his upcoming challenges, Lo said, “I want to be a different person in three months. I want to be a different kind of doctor. I want to learn more from different experiences of being in another country and culture.”

Conclusion

With the ICDF’s assignment of overseas volunteers, and the implementation of the Diplomatic Alternative Service program, Taiwan’s civilian-based diplomacy is becoming more tangible and functional. The ICDF Volunteers and the Diplomatic Alternative Service are realizing exciting new concepts in cooperative development, and serving as vital links between the present and the future in technical and medical missions. Civilian-based diplomacy based on these two programs is enhancing Taiwan’s international stature, and creating productive interaction with friendly nations—whether formally allied or unallied with Taiwan—through joint international cooperation. These two programs show that civilian-based diplomacy and participation in cooperative international affairs is a practical and effective diplomatic attitude and method.