

**Testimony of Erica J. Barks-Ruggles
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on
East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy
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Thank you, Subcommittee Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Romney, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

I am honored to appear before you as the Senior Bureau Official for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. Ambassador Michele Sison, who has been nominated to lead the bureau, had her hearing with the Committee last month.

I want to echo my colleague Jonathan Fritz's words about the importance we place on Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN and its related bodies, and share some details about my Bureau's work on this important issue.

Taiwan's transparent and democratic management of the COVID-19 pandemic is a model for the region and the world. This virus knows no politics and no borders, and we need to ensure we are hearing from everyone with a role to play in the fight against COVID-19.

At the UN Security Council on May 7th, Secretary Blinken called for the modernization of the coalitions we include in diplomacy and development efforts, including forging non-traditional partnerships with civil society and private sector actors.

It is no coincidence that on the same day, he also called on the World Health Organization to allow Taiwan to participate as an observer in the World Health Assembly. Taiwan's public health experts, who have worked to protect the 24 million people on the island, are a prime example of key actors with important information to share. They deserve a voice in the room in institutions like the World Health Organization.

Shutting them out of last month's World Health Assembly under pressure from the People's Republic of China weakened us all. I am proud of the work my team did to advocate for Taiwan's participation, and equally proud of our efforts to work

closely with partners to broaden the coalition of countries that share such objectives. But there is clearly much more work to be done.

In that vein, for more than a decade the Bureau of International Organization Affairs has convened biannual talks to address these concerns. Over time, we continue to expand the scope and breadth of our discussions. I had the honor of convening our twice-yearly talks with Taiwan virtually on March 30th.

Key U.S. government officials and subject matter experts from the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Institute in Taiwan engaged with their Taiwanese counterparts to build support among likeminded countries and incorporate more stakeholders.

It is important to note that these talks included a robust discussion on Taiwan's meaningful participation in UN agencies as well as other international organizations and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Moving forward, the United States intends to focus on several priority areas to demonstrate the added value that Taiwan brings in the international system to tackling regional and global challenges:

- First, working with like-minded nations to advocate for Taiwan's role in global health efforts, such as COVID-19 relief and cancer research with the WHO and International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC);
- Second, advocating for opportunities for Taiwan to attend International Civil Aviation Organization and INTERPOL meetings, and exchange key aviation safety and law enforcement data to promote safer air travel and combat transnational crime; and,
- Third, including Taiwan in the Biden administration's renewed efforts to tackle the global climate crisis, partnering with Taiwan under the auspices of AIT and TECRO to address critical needs related to climate change.

From halting the spread of deadly disease, to ensuring safe and secure aviation, to stopping global crime networks, the 24 million people of Taiwan can make important and constructive contributions in the international system.

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In the face of unprecedented global challenges, we will continue to work assiduously to secure Taiwan's vital voice in the room.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I welcome your questions.

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