Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished guests,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all here today, especially our guests from overseas, who have taken time out during the holiday season to travel to our country.

I believe, however, that the cause which brings us together is indeed of tremendous importance, and demands untiring efforts. I refer of course to the promotion and protection of human rights.

**Taiwan Continues to Move Forward**

I am sure you are all aware of the tremendous transformation that has taken place here in Taiwan over the past twenty years or so, perhaps most dramatically in the political sphere, but also in economic and social areas. Twenty-one years ago, merely staging a commemoration of International human Rights Day earned a group of democracy activist harsh prison sentences. And Now look at this gathering, members of all kinds of civil society groups and our friends from abroad seriously engaged in a public forum on the creation of a National Human Rights Commission.

But, despite such substantial progress, we cannot sit back and rest. No country has ever achieved a perfect democracy or a perfect human rights record. All countries must continue to strive to improve their human rights practice, as well as the quality of their democracy, and Taiwan is no exception. We recognize that there are still many areas, where Taiwan needs to do better. I suppose many of you here today know there better than I do! Therefore, I am extremely pleased to welcome your efforts to help the government design a robust and effective National Human Rights Commission, to help move us forward.

However, my topic today is the impact of this human rights transformation in Taiwan on our foreign policy. During the 1990s, as former President Lee Teng-hui led our country into the new democratic era, he began the process, by making Taiwan’s democratization a theme of our foreign policy. When the so-called “Asian Values” argument was put forward by some regional leaders, President Lee was quick to reject it, and he very clearly advocated the university of human rights principles. Declaring bluntly that” Human beings are human beings,” he made Taiwan into a
beacon of universality in the Asian region.

With the election of President Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan’s democratization has gone one stage deeper, and thus, in his inauguration address, he places special emphasis on the importance of human rights. To put this into practice in the foreign policy realm, we have been working to develop “human rights diplomacy.” Nevertheless, many domestic critics have questioned this as some kind of empty slogan. So what I would like to do today is to explain what we mean by “human rights diplomacy,” and what we are doing to put it into practice. I hope that I can thereby put some of these misperception to rest, and generate increased support for this approach.

Diplomacy as the Projection of National Values

When I was in academia, nobody ever tried to forced me to choose whether to be a realist or an idealist; however, the very first time I appeared before the Legislative Yuan as a minister, some legislators tried to do exactly this. But I think this is a false dichotomy: history teaches us that, in the actual practice of diplomacy, these two philosophies are not mutually exclusive. Instead, most countries combine the two quite frequently and freely.

The most understanding of the goal of diplomacy is the promotion of the national interest overseas. And most people think of the “national interest” in realist terms, such as national security or economic power. But in fact, throughout the modern era, diplomacy has also concerned itself with the promotion of national values. For example, the leaders of the French Revolution were active proponents of their ideals to the rest of Europe, and the other great powers responded by efforts to shore up the values of the old order. Likewise, the European imperialist project, while of course primarily driven by economic concerns, was also substantially buttressed by conflict became a defining feature of international politics, and the promotion of capitalism or communism or democracy or fascism, became mainstream. Here in Taiwan, we felt this force directly, as the ROC government, in order to align itself with the US during the Cold War, felt it necessary to at least pay lip service to American ideals.

I especially want to point out that this idealistic strain in foreign policy was never completely divorced from the realist one; each country felt that the expansion of its values would have direct benefits to itself, by increasing the number of people and countries who would be natural friends and allies.
A more recent trend, growing in strength since the end of the Second World War, has been the emergence of a core set of principles as truly universal values—beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948—which are now accepted by nearly all nations. With the end of Cold war, these values of human rights and democracy have moved firmly onto center stage. As a result, on the one hand, these is a growing importance of human rights in the international system, for example at the United Nations. On the other hand, some kind of human rights diplomacy is practiced by nearly all Western countries, as well as a growing number of other nations, such as South Africa.

Once again, for a democratic country, promotion of human rights is squarely within their interest. For example, according to the theory of democratic peace, democracies do not fight each other, and countries that share basic values are more likely to see eye to eye on a range of issues. I could not put it better than my colleague from Britain, Robin Cook, who has stated simply, “Promoting our values enhances our prosperity, and reinforces our security.” If that is true for the UK, it must be much more so for us here in Taiwan, facing a mortal threat from a decidedly undemocratic neighbor. Since our values in fact lie in the international mainstream, we certainly should not hesitate to emphasize that fact to the world!

So the question remains, how shall we build the universal values of human rights—which have become an integral part of our national values over the last two decades—into our foreign policy? Since there is already too much experience from advanced countries, it is not necessary for us to reinvent the wheel. We have a range of policies to choose from, and it only remains for us to choose our priorities and the methods most suitable to our situation and ability.

Preparing Ourselves for the New Mission

Before we begin, of course, since we are essentially starting from scratch, we must collect information and organize our own resources. In the longer term, this must include putting a priority on human rights content as a key part of the training programs for our diplomats, so that they will be able to act with confidence in this new field.

Let me outline some of the steps we are already taking in order to prepare ourselves for our new mission. First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already established an NGO Affairs Committee, which will strengthen our cooperation with both
democratic and international civil society, naturally including human rights organizations. Second, we are going to appoint an Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights, who will serve as a point man for developing human rights diplomacy, including coordinating activities among the various geographic and functional departments in the Ministry. In addition, we are also appointing other ambassadors-at-large in complementary fields, such as indigenous peoples and women, as well as international healthy.

Third, as you know, we are actively supporting the process of creating a National Human Rights Commission. Since, as with human rights diplomacy in general, there is already a wealthy of experience in the international community on setting up and operating such institutions, we have been collecting information about National Human rights commissions already functioning in other countries and provided it to the Executive Yuan. Moreover, we have provided support to events such as this conference, to help so many distinguished experts together to exchange views and to assist Taiwan’s process, and we will continue this kind of support in the future. Finally, after our Human Rights Commission is established, we will work to facilitate its full participation in relevant international activities, such as those of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. This will be crucial step in fulfilling President Chen’s hope that Taiwan can begin to become integrated into the international human rights system.

Fourth, I have asked our offices overseas to begin collecting information about the influential human rights organizations in each of their host countries, and I have directed the NGO Affairs Committee to do the same for Taiwan’s human rights NGOs. In the future, we hope that, by making this kind of information available, on a two-way-basis, we can facilitate cooperation initiatives among civil societies across international borders.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight another initiative—in addition to the National human Rights Commission, president Chen has pledged to create a national foundation, in collaboration with civil society organizations, for the promotion of democracy. Friends from the US National Endowment for Democracy, the German political foundations, and others around the world have been urging us to take some steps in this area, commensurate with our resources and experiences, and now we are preparing to do so. I am sure this will also bring a lot more energy to our international human rights outreach.
The next question, of course, is what kind of policies will we be pursuing with these new mechanisms and resources? I will divide them into bilateral and multilateral approaches.

**Bilateral Approches**

In bilateral relations, I think first of all that it is obvious to all that there is much we can learn from and gain from increasing cooperation with other democracies on human rights. One of the ways that our Ministry can participate in this process is to sponsor educational and cultural activities at our offices overseas, for example on International Human Rights Day, or 228 Peace Day, or the national human rights days of the host countries, to let people in those countries learn about Taiwan’s human rights development and conditions. This kind of dialogue and mutual sharing of experiences is an important aspect of human rights diplomacy.

Allow me to digress a moment and comment on the Freedom House survey of the state of freedom in the world’s countries, which was released two weeks ago. Of course such a survey can only be a very rough approximation of the actual conditions in a given country, and I do not mean to imply that the methodology Freedom House used is necessarily accurate. Nonetheless, I was very gratified to see that this organization recognized that our transfer of power represented a step forward, and upgraded its rating for Taiwan to the highest level of political freedom. At the same time, as I said before, this does not mean we should be satisfied. Even those countries with the highest ratings, such as the US, will have plenty of human rights issues to address. And the fact that we are not yet rated at the highest level in civil liberties should serve as a sobering reminder of the tasks that lie ahead.

But as Foreign Minister, I could not help making international comparisons. The first thing I noticed is that, according to this report, Taiwan, after all these years of reform, is finally catching up to our Costa Rica! My point is that many observers, especially here in Taiwan, tend to the accomplishments of our formal diplomatic allies. If we look at little Sao Tome and Principe, for example—with only 160,000 people and per capita GDP a bit over US$1000—it has also the same ranking as Taiwan, and it achieved that level earlier than we did; their achievement is even more impressive, given their serious lack of resources. And then I took a look at the rest of our allies, and I found something that would, I think, surprise many people-half of the countries that recognize us were categorized as “Free” and only 10% were labeled “Not Free”—I took some satisfaction from the fact that these ratios are significantly higher than for
the world as a whole, where less than 45% were labeled “Free” and one-quarter were identified as “Not Free.” In other words, quite the contrary of what cynical critics of ten claim, we have every right to be proud of our allies in this respect—even though most of them are not as wealthy as Taiwan, they too have been greatly improving their human rights. Like Taiwan, many of our allies have been active participants in the “Third Wave” of democracy, and we are all moving forward together. And as we are doing so, it is appropriate that we frequently dialogue with each other and share experiences. In fact there is much we can learn from each other.

When we talk about human rights diplomacy, we should also forget the role of development assistance. I think everyone in this room recognizes that poverty and lack of access to basic social services are themselves violations of fundamental rights, and Taiwan has put together a very effective set of international cooperation programs for our allies and other developing countries to help them overcome these problems. It is quite normal that we are further advanced in our economic assistance programs than our political ones, because of Taiwan’s “economic miracle” began well before our democratization. What we are now going to do it to focus these efforts more clearly in a human rights framework, not only to continue to reduce poverty, but also to empower individuals and strengthen the civil societies in our partner countries. The ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently drafting a new International Cooperation and Development Law, which will incorporate these principles. In addition, we are going to expand our placement of development volunteers in the field, by allowing qualified young men to go overseas as an alternative to military service.

**Multilateral Approaches**

As for multilateral approaches, most immediately we are already expanding our links with international civil society networks. For example, we have been actively participating in the World Movement for Democracy—in fact, Prof. Huang attended its most recent world congress in Brazil—and I believe there is much more room for this kind of participation.

At the same time, the government is currently researching the effort to ratify the two major international human rights instruments, the International Covenants on civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Right—which the ROC signed way back in 1967—and enact legislation to put their provisions into our domestic law. This is obviously a major and time-consuming project, requiring a substantial amount
of new and revised legislation, but we hope to at least get the process started in the near future. In addition, we are actively looking into the prospects for signing some of other major international treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. In other words, we are going to start adopting the international standards established by the world community as our own.

**Conclusion: Toward Full Participation for Taiwan**

As you all aware, even after we finally succeed in ratifying these instruments, we will inevitably still face political obstacles to our ability to participate in the relevant committees and mechanisms. Thus we will need to spend a lot of energy and resources struggling for our participation rights internationally, even after we have made so many strides at home.

This, then, is the future of human rights diplomacy. While we continue to build up political and social links with partners around the world who share our values, we will work hard to gain access to international human rights mechanisms. And the foundation for all of this effort is this continuing progress we are making at home.

In fact, the international and domestic sides are inextricably linked. Taiwan’s participation in the international human rights system, just as with the WHO and many other venues, will allow the Taiwanese people to benefit from the protection and information the mechanisms provide, and at the same time it will allow them to make greater contributions to the rest of the world. In other words everyone will benefit if Taiwan is able to participate.

It is the sincere hope of everyone around the world that the 21st century, which has just begun, will be a century of peace, democracy, and human rights. And the people and government of the Republic of China stand ready to do our share to try to make this vision a reality. I look forward to working together with all of you in the months and years to come.

Thank you!