

Taiwan churches urge fair presidential election

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January 13 (ENInews)--Political corruption is drawing such attention in Taiwan that churches are banding together to urge fairness in the 14 January legislative and presidential election.

After a series of reports on suspected bribery cases in aboriginal areas of the nation, the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Taiwan, together with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), asked members not to vote for candidates who buy votes.

Father Otfried Chan, general secretary of the bishops' conference, said at a press conference 10 January that election bribery was a country-wide issue, not just confined to aboriginal people. In Taiwan, 70-80 percent of aboriginal people profess the Christian faith.

The Catholic and Presbyterian churches issued a joint statement urging members to promote a clean and fair election. The National Council of Churches in Taiwan has also adopted a resolution last month asking for a clean election.

The Rev. Andrew Chang, general secretary of PCT, said at an 8 January news conference that vote-buying was damaging Taiwanese democracy. PCT also mobilized its member churches to hold prayer meetings 13 January for the election.

Local media reported that candidates would pay NT\$1,000 (US\$33) for a vote, even though it is illegal in Taiwan.

Last month, a survey reported by Transparency International showed that Taiwan is still lagging on the perception of corruption behind its economically advanced neighbors in Asia, although it moved up one spot to the 32nd place among the 183 governments surveyed. Former Taiwan president Chen Shui-bian is serving a 17.5-year term in prison for bribery.

In related news, eight Canadian observers, several of whom have religious affiliations, are in Taiwan to observe the elections. They include Peter Noteboom, deputy general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches; Lois Wilson, former president of the Canadian council and of the World Council of Churches, and Ted Siverns, former dean of the Vancouver School of Theology. They were invited by the International Committee for Fair Election in Taiwan, according to a news release from the Canadian council.