

Irvine apologizes to Taiwanese

Council meeting draws 175 protesters critical of proposed sister-city agreement with mainland community.

By CINDY CARCAMO and SONYA SMITH
The Orange County Register

IRVINE – After protests by Taiwanese residents, the Irvine City Council decided to rescind a memo stating Irvine will basically not recognize Taiwan.

The council approved a resolution, most of it written during the council meeting, after more than four hours of public comments. The resolution states:

The city will not take a position on the communique between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

The city will maintain and honor the sister city relationship with Taoyuan, Taiwan, and the Xuhui District of Shanghai, China.

The city rescinded the memo signed by an Irvine city staffer stating the city will basically not recognize Taoyuan, Taiwan.

Irvine Mayor Beth Krom will make a new agreement for the sister-city pairing with the Xuhui District. The agreement must “exclude any reference to the communique” between the United States and the People's Republic of China. If that term is not accepted by the Xuhui District leadership, the sister city relationship will be rescinded.

No city of Irvine officials or employees are allowed to sign agreements or memos about sister city relationships without the prior approval of a majority of the City Council.

Irvine City Manager Sean Joyce and city staff will review and propose any changes needed for the sister city program.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the Irvine Sister Cities Foundation decision to only recognize the Xuhui District in China by name and will suspend its relationship with the area unless it recognizes the city's other sister city in Taiwan without any conditions, said foundation president James E. Dunning at the council meeting.

Each of the Irvine City Council members apologized Tuesday to Taiwanese residents after a city staffer signed an agreement with Xuhui in which the city pledged it not to recognize Taiwan, but members had not discussed as of 9 p.m. Tuesday whether they'd rescind an agreement with the Chinese city.

Council members faced two similar resolutions; both would rescind the agreements that were signed and both have provisions for finding a way to avoid such incidents in the future.



DEMONSTRATION: Alice Hsueh of Alhambra waves two flags as part of a protest Tuesday outside Irvine City Hall. CINDY YAMANAKA, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



VOCAL OPPOSITION: Sandy Huang of Monterey Park joins other Taiwanese-Americans outside Irvine City Hall. They sang, “We Shall Overcome” during a lively but peaceful protest Tuesday. CINDY YAMANAKA, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



DISPUTE: Demonstrators oppose the city's agreement with a new sister city in China, seen as a political snub of Taiwan. CINDY YAMANAKA, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The city of Irvine approves sister-city relationships, but the foundation runs the partnership once it is created.

More than 30 of the 175 protesters who demonstrated outside the City Council chambers Tuesday spoke to the council members.

"We should be celebrating our new sister city relationship (with Xuhui)," said Councilwoman Christina Shea. "Unfortunately the city of Irvine has suffered ridicule and embarrassment."

She and the other council members took up the agreement with Xuhui, which sparked an uproar with Irvine's large Taiwanese community. There were 2,798 citizens of Taiwanese descent in the 2000 U.S. Census. Orange County has 9,500 Taiwanese, one of the largest populations in the country.

Irvine already has a longtime sister-city relationship with Taoyuan in Taiwan.

In the pact signed by an Irvine staffer, the city pledged to not send officials to Taiwan's "National Day" celebrations and never to refer to "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan."

Mayor Beth Krom has apologized to the mayor of Taoyuan, Taiwan, and sent a letter to the mayor of the Xuhui District in China, calling the agreement unacceptable. Still, many weren't satisfied and showed up Tuesday to denounce the agreement, calling it "a dirty plot" by China Mayor Sun Chao to undermine Taiwan's existence.

Chao responded in a letter received Monday apologizing for the misunderstanding but added: "We are fully convinced that the city of Irvine will abide by the one China policy upheld by the U.S. government and handle such relationships accordingly."

Before the meeting, Steven Shao of Huntington Beach joined protesters outside council chambers. He said he felt betrayed by the agreement.

"Americans are fighting for freedom in the Middle East and defending freedom and democracy, but yet here the City Council members signed away democracy of the people in Taiwan and here in Irvine," Shao said.

Brian Stanley of Anaheim Hills said the agreement affected him and his Taiwanese wife enormously. He said his wife's parents live in Taiwan and still feel the threat of being taken over by China.

"My wife and I worry about our in-laws every day," Stanley said.



DISSENT: One Taiwanese-American protester from Huntington Beach says he feels betrayed by the sister-city agreement. CINDY YAMANAKA, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER