



China's COVID-19 "Letter Diplomacy"

OE Watch Commentary: The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been quick to capitalize on its handling of the coronavirus and is directing its various influence organizations to diplomatic inroads around the world. As explained in the excerpted article, on 11 March, for example, the International Liaison Department (ILD), also known as the International Department, sent letters to the leaders of over 110 political parties in more than 60 countries, introducing China's experience and practices in preventing and controlling the COVID-19 outbreak.

Established in 1951, the ILD is a central organization within the CCP. Organizations within CCP operate in parallel or within the ministries of the State Council but hold greater power and make important decisions. While the ILD played a much more limited role during the Cold War, liaising with Communist or socialist parties, it has since become the CCP's direct line to political parties worldwide. These meetings often go hand in hand with outreach from the United Front Work Department, China's most well-known organization for exercising political influence at home and abroad.

While its officials sometimes have backgrounds working in the Foreign Ministry, including its current head, Song Tao [宋涛], it is wrong to think of the ILD as subordinate. China's Ministry of Defense, for example, is a minor office compared to the CCP and State Central Military Commissions. The membership of both organizations is identical, with authority over the PLA ultimately laying with the CCP organization. Not surprisingly, Song Tao and the ILD have been major players in China's relations with North Korea, representing the CCP's direct contact with the ruling Workers' Party of Korea.

The department describes itself as "focused on [the] development of healthy and stable relations with other countries" and "striving to build a network of parties and governments and people across all levels of society." Its goal is to "comprehensively introduce our Party's philosophy of governance and policy," and "Tell China's story and convey China's voice," promoting the Party's image globally.

Promoting China's response to the virus is a natural outgrowth of these goals, and it appears to be having an effect. The article notes that as of mid-March, Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee had received over 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy from 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries. Just as the CCP's United Front Work's cultivation of business and cultural groups globally helped China acquire necessary protective equipment to deal with the virus in the early months of this year (often to the consternation of countries that saw their domestic supplies evaporate), the ILD actively engages with the political parties of other countries to help set the tone of diplomatic relations and normalize the CCP's view of governance.

There is, however, a broader picture. The excerpted article from March also notes that beyond sharing experiences with the virus, the ILD is promoting the CCP's vision for a "community of shared future for mankind" [人类命运共同体], an umbrella for China's push for an international system that supports rather than opposes its "national rejuvenation." At the end of April, Zhou Li [周力], former deputy head of the ILD wrote in *Kunlun Policy Online* [《昆仑策网》], an independent but pro-government online journal, that in response to US efforts to "contain China, the primary task in establishing a united front under the New Situation is to consciously plan and unite more countries to contain and resist the unilateralism and power politics that the United States recklessly promotes." To achieve this goal, he believes, China will need to be more active in promoting its vision of global affairs, and go beyond "letter diplomacy." **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Song Tao, 2019.

Source: Karl Norman Alonzo for the Presidential Communications Operations Office, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Song_Tao_2019_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Song_Tao_2019_(cropped).jpg), Public domain

“Since the outbreak, various political parties around the world have paid great attention to the prevention and control efforts in China and offered full recognition and active support. Many political parties and dignitaries from around the world have called and written to the International Liaison Department to express their condolences and support. To date, more than 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy have been sent to General Secretary Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee by 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries.”



Continued: China's COVID-19 "Letter Diplomacy"

Source: “中联部创新” 致信外交” 通过政党渠道分享中国战“疫” 经验 (International Liaison Department's innovative use of “letter diplomacy” through channels to political parties to share China's experience combating the COVID-19 outbreak),” *International Department of the CCP Central Committee*, 13 March 2020. https://www.idcpc.org.cn/bzhd/smwz/202003/t20200313_137707.html

On 11 March, the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee sent letters to the leaders of more than 110 political parties in more than 60 countries, introducing China's experience and practices in preventing and controlling the COVID-19 outbreak.

The International Liaison Department said that this “letter diplomacy” represents the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak that China has systematically introduced its practices and experience in combating the epidemic to foreign parties through political party channels, and is an important initiative of the CCP to actively establish a new-type of inter-party relations with political parties around the world that seek common ground while reserving differences, respect each other and learn from each other.

According to reporters from the International Liaison Department, in the letter, Minister Song Tao outlined the current prevention and control efforts in combating COVID-19 in China, comprehensively sharing China's takeaways and methods with respect to a number of areas. Highlights include: General Secretary Xi Jinping's personal orders, which resulted in the rapid establishment of an efficient joint prevention and control mechanism; the control of sources of infection and the cutting off of transmission channels; the mobilization of national efforts to support the hardest-hit areas; the reliance on science and technology to promote prevention and control of the epidemic; the balancing of prevention and control efforts with the overall economic and social development needs; and the strengthening of international coordination and cooperation.

The International Liaison Department stressed that the Communist Party of China has always put the safety and health of the people first, and General Secretary Xi Jinping has exercised command and made a series of major decisions on epidemic prevention and control in a timely manner, providing direction and impetus to the work. With the concerted efforts of the whole country, the spread of the epidemic in China has been basically curbed, the situation of prevention and control is gradually improving, and the order of production and life is restored at an accelerated pace.

The International Liaison Department points out that, while fighting the coronavirus outbreak, China has been sharing information about the epidemic with the international community in a timely manner in an open, transparent and responsible manner and has actively engaged in international cooperation to combat the pandemic, an effort which has been received positively by the World Health Organization and the international community. In the face of the grim situation of the rapid spread of the virus globally, the CPC is ready to work with political parties around the world to strengthen exchanges and close communication, share experience in combating epidemics, coordinate measures to combat the virus, maintain regional and international public health security, promote common prosperity and development in all countries of the world and promote the building of a community of human destiny.

It is understood that since the outbreak, various political parties around the world have paid great attention to the prevention and control efforts in China and offered full recognition and active support. Many political parties and dignitaries from around the world have called and written to the International Liaison Department to express their condolences and support. To date, more than 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy have been sent to General Secretary Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee by 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries. At present, the situation of epidemic prevention and control in China is gradually improving, and it is necessary for the Chinese Communist Party to inform all parties of the positive progress of epidemic prevention and control in China and respond to the concerns and support of all parties.

In addition, the Communist Party of China empathizes with many countries in the world, as the virus continues to spread around the world. The letter highlights a series of practices adopted by China to promote the prevention and control of the epidemic and economic and social development in an integrated manner, in an effort to share its experience with political parties in a timely manner and provide relevant lessons for countries to prevent the spread of the epidemic. This reflects the Communist Party of China's high level of responsibility for global public health and safety and its mission to build a community of shared future for mankind.