

The Global Impacts of Beijing's Repression in Hong Kong

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Good afternoon. It is an honor to participate in today's meeting. Thank you for your attention to the important matter of deteriorating freedoms in Hong Kong. Much of what I say will reinforce the excellent statements you heard Tuesday and earlier this morning.

The work of Freedom House

I am Director of Advocacy at Freedom House, a nonpartisan, independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world. Founded in 1941, we provide research and analysis on the state of political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories, undertake advocacy on key issues impacting democracy and human rights conditions, and carry out international programmatic work to strengthen democratic institutions and civil society capacity.

Our work on China-related issues includes tracking the status of rights and freedoms in our annual *Freedom in the World* and *Freedom on the Net* reports; special publications on Hong Kong, on Beijing's global media influence, and on the repression of religious groups in China, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners; and advocacy work on all of these issues, including vocal support for the imposition of sanctions on officials involved in rights abuses in Hong Kong and on the mainland, including those involved in the mass detention of Uyghurs.

As you may have seen, this work landed Freedom House on a list of organizations sanctioned by Beijing last December. We were not deterred, and our continued focus on rapidly deteriorating rights in Hong Kong resulted in Freedom House president Mike Abramowitz being one of 11 Americans sanctioned this week by the Chinese Communist Party for “bad behavior” related to Hong Kong. The inconvenience these sanctions pose to Freedom House staff pales in comparison to the sacrifices made by those in Hong Kong and mainland China seeking to protect and promote rights and freedoms, and it is our honor to stand with them.

Declining Freedom in China and Hong Kong

Freedom House has tracked a decline in democracy and human rights conditions in Hong Kong over the last decade, alongside increasing interference by the Chinese government in local affairs. This decline in rights in Hong Kong stems from worsening repression in China as a whole, as Xi Jinping has intensified efforts to exert control both at home and abroad since rising to power eight years ago. The *Freedom in the World* scores for both mainland China and Hong Kong are the lowest they have ever been.

Hong Kong’s History and Recent Developments

As you know, the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, which were worked out before Great Britain’s return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997, created the “one country, two systems” framework that was supposed to guarantee autonomy and the protection of specific rights in Hong Kong until July 1, 2047.

Of course, this is not what has happened in practice. The Chinese Communist Party began tightening control in Hong Kong long before 2047. The current protest movement, which was entirely initiated by the people of Hong Kong and is completely citizen-led, began last March and is bigger and more intense than past pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. Protesters have faced violence from police and pro-Beijing thugs. Some have

reported mistreatment in detention, including sexual harassment and abuse. And many have raised concerns about mysterious supposed-suicides of protesters.

Unable to silence the justified and growing unrest of the people of Hong Kong – who are attempting to protect the rights to which they are supposed to be entitled under law – Beijing effectively terminated the “one country, two systems” model by imposing the sweeping new [National Security Law](#). As you know, this law effectively criminalizes dissent by anyone in the world, anywhere in the world. Since the law took effect on June 30, we are witnessing the transformation of Hong Kong into an authoritarian state at breakneck speed.

So, why should anyone in Canada care about repression in Hong Kong, especially given all that is going on in the world right now?

There are, of course, the economic and security arguments. Hong Kong is home to 300,000 Canadians¹, and is Canada’s third largest market for the export of services and 13th largest market for the export of merchandise, which together totaled \$5.1 billion dollars in 2017.²

But what is probably most compelling to average Canadians is the fact that **CCP repression in Hong Kong is directly impacting what they are able to do in their daily lives.**

Canadians living in Hong Kong are at risk of arrest for running afoul of the National Security Law. They may also fall victim to politically motivated arrests, as we have seen happen in mainland China. You are of course well-aware of the cases of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Perhaps less well-known is the case of Sun Qian, a Canadian citizen and

¹<https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/freeland-says-canadians-in-hong-kong-are-very-very-welcome-to-come-home-1.4967633>

²https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/hong_kong/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_hk.aspx?lang=eng#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20trade%20with,and%20professional%20services%20are%20predominant

businesswoman just sentenced in Beijing to eight years in prison for being a Falun Gong practitioner. It is possible these types of arrests could also occur in Hong Kong.

Repression in Hong Kong poses a direct threat to those living in Canada, too.

The Chinese Communist Party is well-known for targeting dissidents and critics living abroad. As you heard on Tuesday, the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China and Amnesty International Canada did a fantastic report on the harassment and intimidation faced by individuals in Canada working on China human rights issues.³ The report found, “advocates across Canada are increasingly facing threats, intimidation, and harassment for sounding the alarm on serious human rights concerns in China,” and noted that many of these incidents are occurring on university campuses and in secondary schools. We see similar tactics across the United States.

Hong Kong’s national security law takes the risks of intimidation and surveillance, a step further. It criminalizes “provoking hatred” toward the Chinese and Hong Kong governments or “colluding with foreign powers.” Anyone deemed guilty of “subverting state powers” or “inciting secession” could face life in prison. And, it applies even to actions undertaken “outside the region by a person who is not a permanent resident of the region.” This means any Canadian speaking out against repression in Hong Kong could face arrest if they run afoul of Chinese and Hong Kong authorities.

Samuel Chu, an American citizen, faces precisely this scenario. You will hear from him momentarily, and I will let him tell his own story. But, the fact that he as an American citizen is wanted for arrest in Hong Kong due to advocacy work done in the US signals just how far the CCP is attempting to extend its repression. There are also reports that Hong Kong authorities are seeking Jimmy Lai’s American assistant Mark Simon. Mr. Chu and Mr. Simon would risk arrest, and possibly decades behind bars, were they to travel to any

³ <https://www.amnesty.ca/news/human-rights-defenders-increasingly-face-threats-intimidation-over-china-advocacy-report>

country that might extradite them to mainland China or Hong Kong without risking decades behind bars.

Repression in Hong Kong also impacts the information available to Canadians, the products and services they purchase, and the news and entertainment they consume. Many scholars, researchers, and politicians in Hong Kong have served as important sources of information for policymakers and academics around the world, not just about what is happening in Hong Kong, but also about what is occurring in mainland China and elsewhere in Asia. Many of these important voices are no longer accessible. Prominent academics, activists, journalists, and political candidates in Hong Kong have been arrested in recent weeks. Others have been scared into silence. Political groups and advocacy coalitions have disbanded, removing reports and materials from the web or deleting websites in their entirety, deleting social media accounts, and changing phone numbers and email addresses. We do not yet know the long-term impacts of this loss of critical information, but it is not insignificant.

Hong Kong has also emerged as a new CCP redline for international corporations, which have come under pressure to censor their own communications and products for audiences outside China. Air Canada, the Royal Bank, and Canadian multinationals Apple, Amazon, Siemens, LG Electronics, Sony and Toronto-based Manulife have all been accused of listing Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan “incorrectly” on their websites and have faced enormous pressure to modify their websites accordingly.⁴

In October 2019, the National Basketball Association found itself in hot water after Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted, “Fight for freedom. Stand with Hong Kong,” a slogan popular among prodemocracy demonstrators in the territory. Chinese officials expressed outrage. The Chinese Basketball Association cut ties with the Houston Rockets, and Chinese state television refused to air Rockets games. The NBA and

⁴ <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/02/15/china-pressing-canadian-companies-to-call-taiwan-part-of-china-state-documents-show.html>

various players quickly apologized and distanced themselves from Morey's post. This in turn sparked criticism from human rights groups like ours in the United States and Canada, which objected to the NBA's failure to defend free speech. Hundreds showed up at NBA games to protest the NBA's actions, including about 300 people wearing "Stand With Hong Kong" t-shirts at the Toronto Raptors' season opener game.⁵ Elsewhere, protesters were [ejected or had their signs confiscated](#) for holding up slogans as benign as "Google: Uyghurs."

Canadian media has also been impacted by repression in Hong Kong and mainland China. Over the past decade, top CCP officials have overseen a dramatic expansion in efforts to influence public debate and media coverage around the world, including by pressuring newsrooms to censor content critical of the regime. Two journalists at Canada's Global Chinese Press were fired in 2016 and 2017 after they published content deemed displeasing to Beijing.

CCP repression is even making its way into living rooms across Canada via Chinese state-run television. Despite a 2006 ruling by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) that China Central Television 4 (CCTV-4) could continue to operate in Canada only if it remained in compliance with broadcasting regulations, both CCTV-4 and the English-language China Global Television Network (CGTN) have broadcast false information about Hong Kong protests, the detention of Uyghurs, and "about 30 confessions involving about 60 people"⁶, all viewable by anyone in Canada who tunes in to these stations.

Conclusion

We at Freedom House are often told that although the repression happening in Hong Kong may be terrible, it doesn't necessarily affect us here at home. But that's just not true. CCP

⁵ <https://www.newsweek.com/300-people-appear-nba-nets-vs-raptors-game-protest-support-hong-kong-1466411>

⁶ <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/06/16/alleged-forced-confession-victim-worries-crtc-ignoring-complaint-as-federal-government-insists-matter-still-open.html>

repression is already shaping what we can say, where we can travel, the products we buy, and even the news we read.

It is bad enough that the CCP routinely breaks Chinese laws and international commitments by violating the rights of people in mainland China and Hong Kong. The regime certainly should not be permitted to do so in Canada or anywhere else in the world.

I look forward to sharing specific recommendations during the question and answer session. Thank you.

My prepared remarks end here, and I'll save these recommendations for use during the question and answer portion. Including them here only in case they are helpful to have for translation purposes.

Recommendations

- 1. Impose meaningful penalties on Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for human rights abuses and deteriorating freedoms in Hong Kong and mainland China.**
 - a. This should include the imposition of sanctions under Canada's Sergei Magnitsky law.** The United States has already done this, with significant impact. We urge the Canadian government to maximize that impact by deploying the sanctions mechanisms available under Canadian law. We know some Members of Parliament have already called for such sanctions, and we thank you for that.
 - b. Conduct a careful review of the items being imported from or exported to mainland China and Hong Kong, adjusting policies as needed.** Prohibit the importation of products made by slave labor in China, and impose penalties on any individual or entity that knowingly violates this prohibition.

Do not export items that can be used to commit human rights abuses in Hong Kong or on the mainland.

2. **Mitigate, prepare for, and respond to the risks facing Canadians in Hong Kong and facing those living in Canada who work on China human rights issues.**
 - a. **Be ready to act if politically-motivated arrests of Canadians begin to occur in Hong Kong.** Insist any detained Canadians have regular consular access, are not pressured to renounce their Canadian citizenship, and are protected from torture. Prepare for the swift evacuation of any Canadian who may come under threat in Hong Kong for political reasons or in retaliation for pro-democracy work or dissenting views.
 - b. As recommended by the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights, we urge you to **create a position or office that can serve as the primary contact for groups and individuals in Canada facing intimidation, threats, and harassment due to their work on China human rights issues.** This should include the collection of data about such threats and referral to law enforcement officials as appropriate. We commend the Canadian government for suspending its extradition treaty with Hong Kong.
3. **Push back against CCP restrictions on information flowing from Hong Kong and on CCP efforts to bully Canadian businesses or influence Canadian media**
 - a. Since information flows from Hong Kong have been impeded, **seek information about Hong Kong from the many fantastic diaspora groups residing in Canada.** You are already doing a tremendous job of this.. Hong Kongers asked me to also specifically mention the good work of the Canadian Friends of Hong Kong, which has deep understanding of CCP influence operations in Canada.

