Congressional-Executive Commission on China

May 15, 2019

**Testimony of Nathan Law, Founding Chairman of Demosistō and Former Member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong**

Chairman McGovern, Co-Chairman Rubio, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting us to speak here today.

When this committee last held a hearing on Hong Kong two years ago, my good friend and colleague Joshua Wong presented on the threats to Hong Kong. Shortly after that, both he and I were imprisoned for our roles in the Umbrella Movement of 2014 — the largest pro-democracy demonstrations on Chinese soil since the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre.

We both served jail sentences before ultimately winning an appeal. But Joshua Wong has since faced a separate charge related to the same protests. For the past 17 months, he has been entangled in the legal process as he waits for yet another appeal.

This legal nightmare that we youth leaders have endured is part of a larger strategy by Beijing and the Hong Kong government to silence critics and threaten Hong Kongers not to participate in peaceful protests.

I was elected in September 2016 to Hong Kong’s Legislative Council as the youngest legislator in Hong Kong’s history. It was a victory for the Hong Kong people, and our aspirations. But after serving for almost a year, I and five other legislators were unjustly ejected from the legislature under Beijing’s political suppression.

It is seen as retaliation from the government towards the “umbrella generation” and to stifle our demand for democracy.

Lam Wing-Kee, the former owner of Causeway Bay Books and one of five publishers who disappeared from Hong Kong in 2015, also testified at this committee’s previous hearing on Hong Kong. Last month, he left Hong Kong for Taiwan, saying that the proposed extradition arrangements between Hong Kong and China in the future threaten his freedom.

If the extradition changes are passed, then people like Mr. Lam will not even have to be illegally abducted to the mainland because, by that point, the legal mechanism to do so will be in place.

Indeed, in mainland China, journalists, human rights lawyers, women’s rights activists, internet critics and others who have irked the Communist Party have routinely faced a range of nonpolitical-related crimes. One of them is Gui Min-Hai, another Causeway Bay bookseller, who was forced to confess on television three years ago to his involvement in a supposed fatal traffic accident. As of today, he remains detained in China.

This goes to the heart of what Hong Kong people truly fear: that those of us who dare speak out to defend human rights and demand the democracy promised to Hong Kong will risk trumped-up arrest. It imposes a chilling effect on everyone who has a different opinion from the Chinese Communist Party.

It is very important that the international community is alerted to what is happening in Hong Kong, our home, which has long been at the forefront of the clash of authoritarian and liberal values.

Since the Umbrella Movement ended five years ago without achieving universal suffrage for Hong Kong, the situation there has further deteriorated. Today, our struggle continues in the face of these proposed extradition arrangements, which will be detrimental to Hong Kong’s free society, our status as a global financial center, and our “high degree of autonomy” as guaranteed by Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.

The extradition laws will threaten not only ordinary Hong Kong citizens but also any foreigner, including American citizens, visiting, studying, and working in the territory.

Our generation is especially concerned about being sent into a place that does not respect human rights or fair judicial procedures. Last year, two members of Demosistō, our youth political group, were separately detained in China, taken to a hotel, and interrogated by authorities for hours. Their phones were confiscated. They were asked to provide names of more members. Our friends were also asked many questions, including about protest activities in Hong Kong and views on Tibetan independence.

There was no legitimate reason to detain our colleagues. There is a real possibility that this conduct will be normalized soon, and we will expect to hear similar stories time and again. Or maybe we won’t hear the stories—because my colleagues will simply make a forced confession and be sent to jail. Hong Kong will no longer be safe.

The fear of losing the rule of law is not an abstraction for us. Two weeks ago, the largest demonstration since 2014 occurred when 130,000 Hong Kong people took to the street to demand the revocation of these extradition arrangements.

Yes, it is an uphill battle, but we can win, and reverse the downward trend in Hong Kong. We need to restore hope and encourage more people to continue fighting for their liberties. I am still fighting and confident that Hong Kong is China’s best hope for democracy.

Backing from the international community will be crucial to achieving this goal. Therefore, I urge the U.S. to continue voicing concern and pointing out how American interests in Hong Kong will be harmed by the extradition arrangements.

This position should be made explicit in all discussions with the Chinese government to ensure Beijing understands the potential economic consequences if it does not uphold its promises to Hong Kongers. I also hope that more members of Congress will be willing to place human rights at the center of future American policy on Hong Kong.

I came from Hong Kong to explain the Chinese Communist Party’s escalating efforts to undermine our autonomy, open and free traditions, and way of life. A victory for oppressive Beijing government is a victory of authoritarianism anywhere in the world; a victory for Hong Kong people is a victory of freedom anywhere in the world.

It is my hope that the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act can garner more support. The bill will send an unmistakable signal to China and the world that this country remains committed to the universal values we all share.