

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

The Dismantling of Hong Kong's Civil Society

Tuesday, July 12, 2022 – 10:00am

562 Dirksen Senate Office Building & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today's hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on "The Dismantling of Hong Kong's Civil Society" will come to order.
- Earlier this month, Hong Kong marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British handover to the People's Republic of China. Instead of celebrating the "high degree of autonomy" and "universal suffrage" promised to the people of Hong Kong, this anniversary serves as an occasion for Chinese leader Xi Jinping to go to Hong Kong and flaunt the control he now wields over the city.
- It's now been two years since implementation of Hong Kong's draconian National Security Law. In these two years, authorities completed the transformation of Hong Kong from an open society into a city gripped by fear – fear of the mainland's authoritarian repression.
- A city that once boasted a vibrant civil society and pro-democratic institutions saw these pillars of what made Hong Kong so special systematically dismantled. The Hong Kong government now jails protestors and politicians, shuts down independent media, and silences critics, even criminalizing dissent. At least 10,500 Hong Kongers have been arrested for political and protest-related offenses. No fewer than 123 individuals face national security charges and will likely be tried with few or no due process protections and with possible extradition to mainland China. At least 65 civil society organizations have shut down or left Hong Kong for fear of prosecution under the National Security Law. Today, sadly, that once-vibrant civil society is crushed, muted, and scattered.
- Today's hearing offers a microcosm of what's happened and what remains. Our witnesses bring a deep history in civil society in Hong Kong, as well as experience being persecuted, and having to continue their work in exile, in Tokyo, in London, in Los Angeles, and here in Washington, DC. Like so many, they continue to fight for the people of Hong Kong, and its once-proud institutions.
- In recent months, this Commission has heard from dozens of Hong Kong's true patriots: journalists, human rights advocates, students, former legislators, social workers, and

religious clergy, nongovernmental organization staff, doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, and trade union organizers. In the coming days, we will release a report on what those members of civil society have experienced, largely in their own words.

- Today's hearing offers a glimpse into that bleak picture. The Chinese government's policy of crushing resistance turns Hong Kong into a city subject to centralized political control like other cities in China. The civil society voices we've heard from view authorities as coopting those who can be bought, constraining those who can be intimidated, and cracking down on those who cannot be silenced.
- As we hear some of those stories today, I look forward to learning from our witnesses on what we can do to support the civil society that remains in Hong Kong and organizations that now operate elsewhere on behalf of the people of Hong Kong.
- I look forward to exploring with the Biden Administration the additional steps that can be taken to hold accountable those responsible for undermining Hong Kong's autonomy, basic rights, and rule of law. Later today, the Commission will release a staff analysis on the role of Hong Kong prosecutors in these abuses. We hope that this analysis, like the work we do documenting political prisoner cases generally, will shine a light in a dark place and point to a better path ahead. Without objection, these supplementary materials will be entered into the record.