

Written Statement of Sunny Cheung

My name is Sunny Cheung. I am the spokesperson of the Hong Kong Higher Institutions International Affairs Delegation (HKIAD), a group which represents over 100,000 students from all students' unions in Hong Kong. We aim to garner international support through raising concerns and awareness with the international community. Our mission is to mobilize support for the US Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019. In August, we held a peaceful rally in central Hong Kong in August. Over 60,000 people attended to communicate their support for the Act. Currently, we are deeply involved in organizing a large-scale class boycott to put pressure on the government.

Background to the current protest movement: The Umbrella Movement and Hong Kong identity

The 2014 Umbrella Movement was a watershed moment in Hong Kong's story. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated and protested for democracy, but the government granted us nothing but prosecution. We lost hope and realized Beijing would not grant Hong Kong democracy as promised.

Under the "One country, two-systems" blueprint, Hong Kong is gradually become more and more like China. The grand plan and ambition of the Greater Bay Area project is to completely erase our identity as Hongkongers. Hong Kong could become just another city in China. The "Two Systems" framework has not been able to defend us from prosecution under harsh and unfair laws.

But the younger generation will not accept Beijing's cultural invasion. Hong Kong has 177 years of history since 1842, for almost all of which Hong Kong was separate from China and developed its own unique culture and identity. Freedom and the rule of law are our core values. Culturally, Hong Kong is different with China. We consider ourselves as Hongkongers rather than Chinese. A recent survey conducted by the Hong Kong University found that only 11% of respondents see themselves as pure Chinese. We want so much to preserve our local language, Cantonese, and also our Traditional Chinese Characters in written Chinese which are different to the simplified version used in China.

Anti-Extradition Protest and Five Demands

Hong Kong's extradition law protests began as a protest against amendments to the city's extradition legislation which could have marked the end of Hong Kong's autonomy. The Hong Kong government was trying to change the legislation so that it would become legal to extradite people to mainland China. China's courts have no independence, and this move would have permanently compromised Hong Kong's rule of law and autonomy which are protected under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the one-country, two-systems principle.

On 9 June 2019, 1 million people took to the street to say 'no' to the extradition law. Carrie Lam ignored our cry. Students have played a major role although this movement is leaderless. On 12 June 2019, hundreds of thousands of us occupied the streets. The police committed appalling brutality, firing rubber bullets and tear gas at peaceful protestors. Among them were lots of students including high school students. Carrie Lam was forced to 'suspend' the bill. On 16 June 2019, 2 million people marched to ask for a full withdrawal of the extradition bill, an independent inquiry into police brutality, and the retraction of rioting charges.

The government said no to these reasonable demands, despite calls from senior judges and business leaders. They could have defused the situation then, but they chose not to. The scene was set for months of protest. A dozen young people jumped to their death to protest. Many students, take to the streets

leaving behind a note of last wishes as they prepare to die for Hong Kong in each protest. This is the fight for freedom and democracy. We do it because we love our city.

The Police Force were instructed to stamp out the protests by force. Instead of intimidating the brave people of Hong Kong, their actions have strengthened our resolve.

The people of Hong Kong drew up five demands which have been at the core of the protests since June. They are:

The complete withdrawal of the extradition bill from the legislative process.

The retraction of the "riot" characterization.

The release and exoneration of arrested protesters.

An independent inquiry into the police brutality.

The universal suffrage of the city's leadership and the parliament

In September Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive finally agreed to propose the withdrawal in the city's Legislative Council. But this is too little, too late, particularly after months of police violence.

Police Brutality

What is now driving the protests is the ongoing violent actions of the police. Beijing have given the Hong Kong Police Force complete free rein, and their actions have horrified the Hong Kong public. Their actions include randomly firing tear gas to the general public and journalists, firing tear gas inside train stations, shooting rubber bullets to the heads, as well as the mistreatment and torture of detainees. This has led to a collapse of trust in the government and the police force. Compromise will not be possible until the government calls an independent inquiry into police brutality.

There have been multiple horrifying events. The events of 21 July 2019 were a key turning point. White-shirted members of triad gangs entered Yuen Long MTR station carrying wooden sticks and beat up civilians, journalists, protestors returning home, and the lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting. Lam's arm was broken, and many were hospitalized including a number of journalists. The images were broadcast throughout Hong Kong.

The police did not respond to emergency phone calls for the first forty-five minutes and failed to stop the gang members or arrest anyone that evening. Images appeared of members of the mob standing alongside police officers earlier in the evening, holding the sticks they later used to attack protestors. Police inaction has granted impunity to these thugs who now routinely attack protestors and civilians. Another awful evening was the 31 August 2019, when the police indiscriminately attacked civilians in the Prince Edward MTR station. One of the victims was a representative of HKIAD. On that traumatic and horrifying night, he was wearing a suit and passing through the Prince Edward train station. Yet, with the blockade created by the police, countless innocent civilians were trapped and the press was ordered to leave the scene without justification. He was outflanked on an escalator alongside a group of innocent civilians, who were just trying to get safe passage out of the station, which had become a hunting ground for the police. Then the passengers were insulted, arrested, struck, and stepped on by the police with batons and shields. They arrested them despite knowing they were innocent.

Besides, we students' union members frequently received threatening letters targeting us and our family that we would soon be killed. The threat against Students' Unions leaders are real and common. The Chair of the Hong Kong University Students' Union has resigned and fled the city after he was beaten violently. There is a collapse of trust in the government and the police force. Compromise will not be possible until the government calls an independent inquiry into police brutality.

Why does Hong Kong matter? Asia's prominent world city is dying.

Hong Kong's story matters. Hong Kong is one of the world's top international financial centres, and one of Asia's few liberal cities. Our people care about freedom and democracy, we disprove the lie that Asian cities cannot have democratic values.

This is particularly true for young people. We will not compromise our dignity, freedom and democracy for superficial prosperity. How we see our future and the meaning of life is different from the older generation. The older generation especially those who are now ministers in the government and leaders of businesses, see material gain as the ultimate goal and success in life. But in Hong Kong prosperity is only for the few. 22 years after the change-over of sovereignty, we have to wake up to the fact that we cannot compromise our dignity and freedom for the sake of stability and prosperity for the rich and those who are in power.

Over 1 million HongKongers are living below the poverty line. Inequality in Hong Kong is at extreme levels for a developed country and getting worse. An Oxfam report last year found that the median monthly income of the top decile of the population was 44 times higher than the lowest decile in 2016, up from 34 times in 2006. Hong Kong people live in some of the smallest apartments in the world because the government controls the supply of land and releases it slowly, in the interests of developers rather than the population.

Our system is corrupt because we do not have democracy as promised in the Basic Law. We cannot vote for our leader, and the Legislative Council is rigged by a functional constituency system which means that big businesses and vested interests decide who represents 50% of the seats. Successive Chief Executives have done dirty backroom deals with property tycoons to keep home prices artificially high. Democracy is and will be one of our core demands for this reason.

Hong Kong is on the frontline of the battle for freedom and against the authoritarian China.

Since joining the World Trade Organization, China has been utilizing the benefits of free trade to consolidate its authoritarian governance. The rise of an authoritarian China puts liberal democratic values in danger.

Domestically, Communist Party suppresses activists in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Xinjiang, where the Chinese authorities have built concentration camps and subject ethnic minorities to mass surveillance, torture, killings and arbitrary arrests. On this subject, UN decried China as shameful country last year.

Globally, under China's money diplomacy tactic, many small countries have already been compromised and lost their control over the local society such as Sri Lanka has to lease a strategic port to China for 99-years. Scholars describe this phenomenon as economic colonialism and new imperialism. It is crystal clear that China is using their economic dominance to penetrate foreign societies, business sectors, political parties and universities to gather intelligence and thereby undermining their autonomy. Fortunately, several countries have woken up to this reality finally realize how China intends to negatively impact the world. One year ago, Canada started to shut down the Confucius Institutes, stopping China to preach their propagandas to affect youths in Canada. Australia parliament also ratified amendments to their national security law to prohibit foreign interference targeting China apparently.

Over the past few months, Hong Kong people have demonstrated to the world that we believe in democracy and liberty, even though we face a harsh crackdown from the Chinese Communist Party regime. Hong Kong is an international city, China has benefited from its special customs status, 70% foreign investment of China comes from Hong Kong. China utilizes Hong Kong to do illegal trading with North Korea and Iran and even purchases weapons from European countries which should have weapon embargo on China. Therefore, international powers also have a say in the city's future. Hong Kong is at the frontline of the battle against authoritarianism. It is vital that the United States work with like-minded countries to ensure that the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong's people are protected.

Our call: Pass the Human Rights and Democracy Act, 2019

This is why we are calling for the Hong Kong human rights and democracy act to be passed. The legislation provides critical strengthening to the Hong Kong Policy Act which will act to place the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong's people at the heart of US-Hong Kong policy. Also, we hope the US government can protect Hong Kong people who unfortunately have the criminal record due to the participation into protests in Hong Kong. We hope the US government can still grant visas to them through a regular routine if they tend to study or work in the States. It is because Hong Kong government intentionally prosecutes protestors with ancient and colonial law which is the Public Order Ordinance. With this law, Hong Kong people can be easily convicted as guilty even they do not necessarily participate in a protest. We sincerely ask for you all to ensure that people who have taken part in protests are not barred from receiving visas to the US.

Lastly, we hope the US government can keep up the good work to monitor the rise of an authoritarian China. The invasive economic dominance, reprehensible communist ideologies and deteriorating human situation of China should be deeply concerned by the US government. 50 years ago, US President Truman famously gave a speech which is the Truman Doctrine. He warned American and the world that the danger of communism was real. He argued that it was the responsibility of the US to support the free world. 50 years later, Communist China poses a threat to the international peace and world liberal system. Hong Kong is now at the frontline in the battle against totalitarianism. We never hesitate to take every step, with the last inch of our effort, to fight for freedom. The grandest of our ideals is an unfolding promise since the last world war that each human being deserves a chance to live with dignity and to live for liberty. Hong Kong is in a critical moment in its history. We are calling for the US to stand with us in our fight for freedom, democracy and dignity. Thank you.