

Congressional-Executive Commission on China
"A Son and Daughter's Appeal to Xi Jinping to Release Their Dad, Jimmy Lai"
Wednesday, September 16, 2026
Testimony by Sebastien Lai

Chairman Sullivan, Co-Chairman Smith, and Honorable Members of the Commission:
Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

The title of this hearing is, "A Son and Daughter's Appeal to Xi Jinping to Release Their Dad, Jimmy Lai." I regret to inform you that my sister, Claire, is unable to testify. Claire has been a tireless advocate for our father's freedom. She was grateful to be invited to testify by this Commission, and she would have been honored to address you today. Sadly, a few weeks ago, Claire was diagnosed with cancer. My mother and I were able to be with her as she began chemotherapy in London last week. But my father, imprisoned in Hong Kong, had to learn about his own daughter's diagnosis from his lawyers. Knowing she is sick and he is unable to care for her is a great burden for him. Claire would like nothing more than to have him with her as she fights this difficult battle. We can only hope that, given these distressing circumstances, the Chinese authorities will consider granting my father compassionate release so that he can spend his remaining days at his daughter's side.

I would like to take a few moments to briefly tell my father's story. It's not an exaggeration to call it a hero's story, because my father is the bravest and most principled man I've ever known.

Jimmy Lai escaped Communist-controlled China as a boy of 12, making his way to the British colony of Hong Kong as a stowaway on a fishing boat. He quickly found work in a garment factory. His grit, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit made him a very successful businessman.

His story might have ended there. He could have been content with his personal success and lived a comfortable, trouble-free life as a businessman and family man. But my father—scarred by the horrors of the Maoist upheavals he experienced as a child on the mainland, and shocked by the massacre of innocent students and protesters at Tiananmen Square—felt a responsibility to do all he could to protect the basic human rights and democratic values that he cherished in Hong Kong.

So, in 1995, just two years before the British handed Hong Kong over to a CCP that made the promise of "one country, two systems," my father founded a newspaper. He believed that a free press was essential to safeguard the rights of Hong Kongers, and that by giving them information he was also giving them freedom. *Apple Daily* would quickly become the city's most successful newspaper. But its strong pro-democracy editorial line and its regular criticism of the CCP put a target on my father's back.

As the CCP began to crack down on Hong Kong, our family frequently received threats and harassment. Our home in Hong Kong was firebombed. But my father refused to be intimidated. He promoted peaceful resistance to CCP-backed oppression and joined millions of his fellow Hong Kongers in taking to the streets to campaign for basic human rights.

Hundreds of police officers raided Apple Daily's newsroom in August 2020. They handcuffed my father and perp-walked him out of the building. He was charged under the city's new vague and draconian national security law, which made free speech a crime. Though a British citizen, he never had any consular access. He was convicted on specious charges for his peaceful, pro-democracy campaigning, and has now spent nearly 6 years in solitary confinement in brutal conditions. In February, he was sentenced to an additional 20 years in prison, effectively a death sentence.

My father is now 78 and in ill health. He has diabetes, a heart condition, and many other ailments. The authorities refuse to allow independent medical care for him, and grant him only very short visits with family, always behind glass. Knowing that he is a devout Catholic, they routinely deny him Holy Communion. He will not last long in the terrible conditions he is kept in.

Let me repeat: His only crimes were standing up for free speech and basic rights, calling for democracy, and bringing attention to Beijing's abuses. He could easily have fled, but he chose to stay and act as a lightning rod for the CCP's anger so as to protect his employees as much as he could.

His case has become a global example of how repressive regimes use national security laws to silence dissent and independent media.

We are enormously grateful for the support my father has received from governments, organizations, and individuals around the world—and especially for the support he has received from the United States. In Congress, Members from both parties have long agreed that my father's release must be a priority. In recent months, more than two-thirds of Senators and dozens of House Members have asked the President to continue his efforts to free my father. Due to my father's prominence as a political prisoner, this case is most likely to be resolved leader-to-leader.

I speak to you only a week before President Trump will be hosting Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping for a state visit at the White House. President Trump has assured us that he is committed to our father's release. It is a matter of public record that he has brought my father's case before Xi at least twice in person: in November at the APEC Summit, and in May when he was a guest of the Chinese leader in Beijing. We are immensely grateful for the President's efforts. However, by the President's own account, both times his overtures were rebuffed.

This time Xi will be the guest of President Trump and the American people in the nation's capital. We're counting on the President to push hard for our father's safe return—and hoping that his guest will respond with good will.

President Trump and his administration have been instrumental in freeing many political prisoners around the world. We believe that he is our best chance of saving my father's life. We are confident that President Trump understands the urgency of this situation and that he will do everything he can to ensure my father is finally released.

Our family's appeal to President Xi is simple: My father has suffered long enough. He poses no threat to your regime. His continued imprisonment only makes him a symbol of its injustice, and his death in prison would be a disgrace and dishonor. Let Jimmy Lai leave Hong Kong and live out the rest of his days in peace, with us.