

Written statement to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China

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Chair, Co-Chair, and Members of the Commission:

I submit this statement to bear witness to a lived reality: Hong Kong's human rights crisis is also a crisis of public accountability, with consequences that reach beyond its borders. By imprisoning those who challenge power, dismantling civic institutions, and placing political obedience above professional judgment, the regime weakens society's ability to recognize failures and correct them. Transnational repression extends that pressure to Hong Kongers abroad and their families, threatening the freedom to speak and organize even after leaving the city.

That reality is reflected in Joshua Wong's imprisonment; the persecution of the Hong Kong Alliance and the suppression of June Fourth remembrance; the loss of student institutions; and restrictions on academic exchange and independent journalism, including pressure on the diaspora newsroom Pulse HK. The Wang Fuk Court fire and the treatment of those seeking answers in its aftermath show why people must remain free to demand accountability. Overseas, bounties, election-related targeting, sexualized harassment, and pressure on families show why protecting that freedom also requires action beyond Hong Kong.

I ask the Commission to press for prisoners' release, extend protection and humanitarian pathways for Hong Kongers at risk, support sustained funding for civil society and diaspora media, and protect advocates and their families from transnational repression. Sustained pressure matters: protecting these freedoms also preserves the people and institutions capable of holding power accountable when the next major crisis comes.

Political imprisonment and Hong Kong's future

On 3 May 2017, I sat in the Commission's hearing room and listened to Joshua Wong speak. He was twenty. He acknowledged me in the audience as he addressed this Commission about Hong Kong's future. Nine years later, I return to that moment in this written submission because the years since then have changed both his life and the possibilities for public life in Hong Kong.¹

Joshua is now twenty-nine and has already spent more than six years in custody. He has been continuously detained since November 2020. The prison terms in his cases add up to seven years and two and a half months before accounting for overlap between cases. On 2 September 2026, he pleaded guilty in a further national-security prosecution for conspiracy to collude with foreign or external elements. Sentencing was adjourned. A lengthy additional term could keep him imprisoned into his forties or beyond.²

For much of his twenties, Joshua has been kept from participating freely in public life. The closure and weakening of civic institutions also diminish the opportunities available to younger generations.

June Fourth: memory and responsibility

Joshua and I belong to a generation shaped by those who kept the memory of June Fourth alive. Before it was forced to close, the Hong Kong Alliance organized annual candlelight vigils for three decades, making remembrance a shared public responsibility. Among its persecuted leaders are Lee Cheuk-yan, who was in Beijing during the crackdown, and Albert Ho, a former pro-democracy legislator. Both helped sustain the Alliance across the decades. Chow Hang-tung began attending its vigils as a child and later became one of its leaders. Today, she speaks forcefully against the regime, its lies, and the use of the courts to suppress dissent. Their imprisonment reaches across generations, punishing people who preserved that memory and those who took up the responsibility of carrying it forward.³

June Fourth helped shape me while I was still a secondary-school student. I remember my history teacher crying in front of us as he shared his experience. He had been a student in 1989 and had watched the massacre unfold live on television. His tears are part of my memory of June Fourth, and part of why its commemoration matters to me. Public remembrance allows an experience to reach people who did not live through it themselves. It gives another generation the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and decide what responsibilities that history places upon them.

The Hong Kong Alliance sustained a public setting for that exchange. In my recent research at Britain's National Archives, I found a diplomatic record showing how early its activities had been treated as a threat. A British telegram dated 22 February 1990 records a meeting the previous day with He Wei, an official in the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office. She accused the Alliance's planned April–June activities of aiming to subvert the Central People's Government and the mainland's socialist system, and called on the British to act.⁴

I read the Chinese warning as an early expression of the political logic confronting us today: independent organization for democratic change could be treated as a threat to state power. The danger expressed in that warning has become part of Hong Kong's reality.

The Alliance voted to disband in September 2021, and the government ordered it struck off the Companies Register the following month. On 11 September 2026, Chow Hang-tung, Lee Cheuk-yan, and Albert Ho received prison sentences of seven years and three months, seven years, and five years and two months respectively for incitement to subversion. The charges concerned activities after the national security law came into force.⁵

Chow Hang-tung's published mitigation text makes clear what is at stake. She wrote that citizens have a responsibility to put state power "back inside the cage of democracy": to control it and hold it to account, seeking justice for past harm while preventing greater disasters. She warned that feeding a state apparatus beyond their control in the name of national security would erode humanity and conscience, making tragedy only a matter of time. She also insisted that ending one-party dictatorship was an inescapable responsibility for Hong Kongers and Chinese people of her generation to fulfil themselves; no outsider could do it for them.⁶

After the sentencing, her mother urged those outside the courtroom to carry on: "Do not lose heart, and do not feel guilty, because guilt is a poison that divides us." She asked people to live well. Her words speak to the responsibility of those of us who remain free to act.⁷

Today, I can commemorate June Fourth only outside Hong Kong, with other members of the diaspora. Remembrance continues there, but the institution that helped sustain it publicly in Hong Kong has disappeared. To me, the imprisonment of its leaders reveals the reach of this effort to erase public memory. The regime is also removing people from the public life in which they could speak the truth, organize others, and hold it accountable.

Student institutions and academic freedom

Alongside imprisoning those who have kept the memory of 1989 alive, the regime relentlessly suppresses emerging voices and younger generations. Its dismantling of student unions strikes at institutions that helped nurture successive generations of civic leaders. As these institutions close, Hong Kong loses places where young people can learn to take responsibility for public life.

I served as secretary-general of the Hong Kong Federation of Students during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Student representation was part of my own path into public life. Through student institutions, young adults could learn to organize, negotiate, choose representatives, and answer to those they represented.

From the 1960s into the 2010s, student institutions offered routes from campus participation into wider civic life. That experience could matter long after graduation, whether someone became a doctor or nurse, a lawyer, an engineer, an accountant, a businessperson, a civil servant, a politician, a civic leader, a nonprofit professional, or a cultural worker. The habits of listening, taking responsibility, and questioning authority belong throughout society.

By August 2026, according to Amnesty International UK, student unions at six of Hong Kong's eight publicly funded universities had disbanded or stopped functioning. Recognition was withdrawn at the University of Hong Kong; the Chinese University of Hong Kong described its union's operations as effectively disbanded; Baptist University suspended its union's operations; and Lingnan's union announced its dissolution. City University of Hong Kong's union moved its services off campus in 2023, while the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's union retained a formal university role.⁸

The pressure on student life has also fallen directly on students who took part in the 2019 protests. By 31 July 2021, 4,009 students had been arrested and 1,102 prosecuted in related cases, according to government figures. These figures show the scale of arrests and prosecutions affecting a generation of students.⁹

The pressure extends to the exchange of knowledge beyond Hong Kong. In December 2025, I participated in a Hong Kong studies conference at Academia Sinica in Taiwan. I knew that Hong Kong institutions had barred scholars from attending and threatened them with dismissal or other punishment if they did so. The freedom at stake was the ability to exchange knowledge and ideas with other scholars. I regard attempts to control who may take part in such discussions as an attack on academic freedom, inside Hong Kong and beyond it.

The freedom to question authority

Elected representation is one way the public can demand answers from those who govern. The 2021 electoral restructuring left only twenty of the Legislative Council's ninety seats allocated to

direct geographical elections. In the 7 December 2025 general election, turnout in those geographical constituencies was 31.90 percent. By comparison, turnout in the 2019 District Council election was 71.23 percent. I see this stark contrast in public participation, alongside the removal of meaningful electoral choices, as evidence of a profound erosion of the legislature's democratic legitimacy. Hong Kongers need meaningful electoral choices as well as the freedom to organize between elections. The weakening of these channels makes independent public scrutiny still more important.¹⁰

Public accountability also depends on people being able to find out what those in power are doing. The dismantling of independent news organizations has weakened that capacity. Apple Daily published its last edition on 24 June 2021 after police raids and arrests; Stand News shut down following a police raid on 29 December that year. Each closure removed reporters, editors, and an institution through which scrutiny could reach a wider public.¹¹

The pressure reaches overseas newsrooms as well. In August 2025, a Ta Kung Pao commentary singled out the planned Pulse HK (追光者) newsroom, accused it of ideological warfare against China and Hong Kong, and urged pressure on its funding. In June 2026, Reporters Without Borders reported failed cyberattacks against Pulse and described its cofounder's account of fundraising disruption. The report did not establish who was responsible. These pressures make dependable support for diaspora media especially important. These newsrooms keep Hong Kongers informed and keep questions about the city in public view.¹²

Wang Fuk Court and the freedom to demand answers

The fire at Wang Fuk Court on 26 November 2025 took 168 lives and made international headlines. The public should have been free to grieve, express anger, hold peaceful rallies, and demand answers. Thousands gathered to mourn, but Beijing's national-security authorities warned against using the disaster to disrupt Hong Kong. The response to people seeking accountability showed how dangerous it could become to turn grief and anger into organized action.¹³

Miles Kwan, a student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), helped organize a petition calling for an independent inquiry and accountability. He was detained on 29 November and released on police bail on 1 December. In February 2026, CUHK terminated his studies. He had completed his credits but was still awaiting confirmation that he could graduate. Kwan said the disciplinary panel had added demerits for breaching confidentiality and for his conduct towards the panel; he disputed the process. CUHK declined to discuss the individual case. His experience shows how a student who sought answers after the fire could face police action and then see his university studies end before graduation.¹⁴

The formal response to the fire must remain open to scrutiny. By August 2026, the Independent Committee had held thirty days of evidential hearings involving eighty witnesses and had invited information from the public twice. It expected to submit its report by the end of October. In September, the Buildings Department brought charges against four individuals and two companies over the estate's major repair works. These proceedings are part of the response whose results the public must be able to examine.¹⁵

The conditions for that examination matter alongside the proceedings themselves. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that Beijing's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong summoned international journalists on 6 December 2025 and warned them over coverage following the fire. Officials objected to what they called false information; CPJ characterized the encounter as intimidation. Residents need answers, and journalists need the freedom to pursue questions that official accounts leave unresolved.¹⁶

An inquiry can gather evidence and make recommendations. Its contribution to accountability also depends on what happens around and after it: whether people can challenge its explanations, identify omissions, and press for recommendations to be implemented. The capacity to question authority must survive the announcement of a formal process.

Transnational repression: extending fear beyond Hong Kong

The suppression of scrutiny does not stop at Hong Kong's borders. Since the national security law was imposed in 2020, the regime has used national-security powers to silence, punish, and threaten people at home while pursuing advocates overseas. Leaving Hong Kong does not necessarily free people from that pressure.

The legal framework helps extend its reach. The 2020 law claims jurisdiction over certain acts committed abroad, including by people who are not Hong Kong permanent residents. The 2024 ordinance implementing Article 23 added measures against designated overseas "absconders," including passport cancellations and restrictions on funds and property. China's Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, effective from 1 July 2026, adds a further assertion of overseas legal responsibility through Article 63. UN experts have warned of its potential use for transnational repression. This new assertion of legal reach follows a pattern of pressure that began years earlier.¹⁷

In December 2024, Hong Kong police announced HK\$1 million bounties against six more people, including Joe Tay and Carmen Lau. During Canada's 2025 federal election, when Tay was a candidate, Canadian authorities documented coordinated amplification of his arrest warrant and bounty, attacks on his competence, and suppression of searches for his Chinese name on certain PRC-based platforms. This brought the threat of punishment into his participation in another country's democratic process.¹⁸

Lau has described another form of intimidation: AI-generated sexual images depicting her, mailed to her neighbours in Britain. Reuters reported in December 2025 that Thames Valley Police were investigating images they believed had been digitally altered. The report did not establish who sent them. The abuse she described shows how public advocacy can be met with attempts to humiliate and isolate a person in the community where they have sought safety.¹⁹

Families also face consequences. On 26 February 2026, Anna Kwok's father, Kwok Yin-sang, was sentenced to eight months in prison under the 2024 national-security ordinance for attempting to withdraw funds from an insurance policy the court treated as her assets. Anna disputes that she owned or controlled the policy and describes the prosecution as retaliation for her advocacy; the magistrate rejected the characterization of collective punishment.²⁰

Overseas activists have told me directly that relatives in Hong Kong and mainland China have received calls seeking the activists' whereabouts and personal information. Such calls can make

people fear that speaking publicly will expose their loved ones to harm. The uncertainty over who is watching, and what might happen next, can itself become a means of intimidation.

Pressure can also reach people's resources. In December 2020, Hong Kong police asked banks to freeze accounts belonging to Ted Hui and his family on suspicion of money laundering. An April 2026 China Strategic Risks Institute report documents Christopher Mung's disputed retrospective tax demands, including an assessment of profits from a business he says he never operated. He has challenged the demands; his appeal was still unresolved when the report was written.²¹

I see a system that seeks to govern through fear, intimidation, and the expectation of surveillance. That fear reaches beyond those directly targeted, as others begin weighing civic participation against danger to themselves or their families. Democracies must protect the freedom to hold the regime accountable, and the people who continue to exercise it.

What sustained pressure can achieve

The loss of these freedoms, and of the people and institutions that defend them, calls for a sustained U.S. response. The Commission's mandate to monitor human rights and the rule of law, gather evidence, and recommend legislative and executive action provides a basis for keeping both individual cases and institutional changes before Congress and the Administration. I ask you to pursue four priorities.²²

First, press for the immediate and unconditional release of Joshua Wong, Lee Cheuk-yan, Albert Ho, Chow Hang-tung, Jimmy Lai, and others imprisoned for peaceful political participation, remembrance, or journalism. I ask the Commission to urge the Administration to make their release a sustained priority in its engagement with Hong Kong and Chinese authorities.²³

Second, give Hong Kongers at risk the security to rebuild their lives. I ask you to urge the Administration to extend Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) before its current expiry on 5 February 2027, and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure uninterrupted employment authorization for those covered. The Administration should also consider updating the eligibility cutoff to reach more recent arrivals who face danger on return. DED offers temporary protection from removal; people need a future beyond repeated extensions. Congress should legislate a durable humanitarian pathway to permanent residence for qualifying Hong Kongers and their families.²⁴

Third, fund the institutions that allow Hong Kongers to remain informed and connected. I ask you to urge Congress to authorize multi-year operating support for Hong Kong civil-society groups, especially diaspora media, and to sustain that support through dependable appropriations. Funding should be administered through the State Department or independent grant-making bodies with appropriate authority. Newsrooms need to pay reporters and editors, investigate stories, obtain legal assistance, and maintain secure publishing systems. Community groups need staff and places to sustain their work. Support should help newsrooms reach audiences inside Hong Kong as well as across the diaspora. The Commission's 2025 report already recommended facilitating diaspora-led news outlets and investigative journalism; Congress should turn that recommendation into dependable support. Grants should protect editorial independence and confidential sources, with oversight of grant spending that respects those protections.²⁵

Fourth, protect advocates and their families from transnational repression. I ask the Commission to urge the Administration to coordinate law-enforcement, diplomatic, and immigration responses with democratic partners, universities, and community organizations. People exercising their civic freedoms need confidential reporting, timely risk assessments, investigation of threats, and practical legal, digital, and physical protection.²⁶

Safeguards must also prevent international cooperation from becoming a means of persecution. The United States and its partners should coordinate their policies toward China to defend democratic sovereignty against authoritarian interference. My concern is that authoritarian regimes exploit friction among democracies over monetary, fiscal, trade, and security policy to consolidate their power and suppress dissent.

I do not expect these measures to transform Hong Kong or end China's aggression against democratic countries overnight. Sustained pressure matters because it preserves a record, keeps people and institutions from disappearing from international attention, and builds the relationships and policy options needed when circumstances change. Preparation takes time, and the moment when action becomes possible may arrive before governments feel ready.

My concern is that threats to public accountability have been accumulating since 2019, with roots reaching further back. A future crisis could expose weaknesses allowed to grow because criticism was suppressed or professional warnings went unheard.

Joshua, the Alliance, free press and free speech, and the student institutions that shaped me are part of how Hong Kong passes on memory and responsibility. Protecting the freedom to participate and question authority protects that capacity—including the ability to recognize failures, correct mistakes, and hold power accountable before the cost becomes irreparable.

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