



FACT SHEET: Promoting Religious Freedom for Hong Kong

The Issue

Hong Kong was once a bastion of religious freedom. Since the implementation of the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020, the CCP has increased religious persecution as it seeks to “Sinicize,” or secularize, religion in Hong Kong as it has done in the mainland. Beijing has even signaled that it may seek to extend its 2018 deal with the Vatican on the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops in China to the Catholic Church in Hong Kong. These early warning signs suggest a need for increased vigilance from the U.S. and the international community to monitor deteriorations in religious liberty and continued support for persons of faith in Hong Kong.

What is Xi Jinping’s Sinicization and How Does it Threaten Hong Kong’s Religious Freedom?

“Sinicization” is the CCP’s official policy of secularizing religious beliefs so that they conform to and support the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It was first promoted by Xi Jinping in 2016, when he called on the Party to “guide the adaptation of religions to socialist society.” Religious communities in China are absorbed into the Party’s United Front to facilitate indoctrination and encourage ideological conformity.

Hong Kong is the CCP’s next target to Sinicize religions. Catholic clergymen in the city were briefed about Sinicization by Chinese religious leaders. All Hong Kong schools, including religious-based schools, are legally required to provide “national-security education.”¹ While the Sino-Vatican secret deal doesn’t currently extend to Hong Kong, there are multiple instances where Beijing has sought to influence Hong Kong’s diocese, including the appointment of Hong Kong bishop after predecessor’s death, and the attempts to impose new administrative measures on religion. In addition to the policies of Sinicization, the CCP has also actively

¹ Hoi Man Wu and Cheryl Tung, “Hong Kong University Requires Students to Take National Security Education Course”, *Radio Free Asia*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/national-security-class-07262022111557.html>.

targeted persons of faith through imprisonment; high-profile political prisoners like Jimmy Lai and Joshua Wong can also be characterized as religious prisoners of conscience.

How Can We Safeguard Religious Freedom in Hong Kong?

To prioritize religious freedom in Hong Kong, the U.S. government, in concert with partners and allies, should:

- 1. Discourage the Vatican from expanding its 2018 deal with Beijing.** The US should oppose any expansion of the Sino-Vatican deal in the strongest terms and continue in diplomacy with the Vatican to urge the repeal of the 2018 deal which has already been renewed twice.
- 2. Press for the release of all political prisoners including religious prisoners of conscience.** There are hundreds of Hong Kong political prisoners that could be adopted by members of Congress or Commissioners at the U.S. Commission on International Religious. These include high-profile individuals, like Jimmy Lai, Joshua Wong, and others.
- 3. Monitor deteriorations in religious freedom in Hong Kong.** The US should monitor the state of religious persecution in Hong Kong and establish safe and secure channels to communicate with the underground church in the PRC and religious societies in Hong Kong.
- 4. Partner with other persecuted groups in China to advance U.S. policy toward China.** The development of more regularized and systematic mechanisms can help facilitate coordination with and between affected communities, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, Christians, and other persons of faith.