



Transnational Repression by Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing on “Transnational Repression and the U.S. Response”

February 15, 2024 - 10 a.m.
2247 Rayburn House Office Building

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Chairman McGovern, Chairman Smith, distinguished Members and all staff of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Frances Hui, I am the first Hong Kong activist to secure asylum in the U.S. In December 2023, the Hong Kong authorities placed HK\$ 1 million bounty on me for my international advocacy.

For decades, the CCP has targeted the Hong Kongers, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Taiwanese, and Chinese dissidents all around the world. The CCP, as Freedom House has indicated, is carrying out the world's most sophisticated and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression.¹

In this written testimony, I will first describe some of my personal experiences as a target of transnational repression carried out by both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments, and pressing issues that threaten overseas activists. I will then conclude with some suggestions that the United States can adopt to counter the CCP's effort to silence dissent around the world.

Personal Experiences with Death Threats and Harassments

The issue of transnational repression is a topic that is deeply personal to me.

During the Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement in 2019 and 2020, I was a student studying at Emerson College in Boston. I coordinated rallies around the world in support of the movement and provided education about the situation in Hong Kong to members of Congress, scholars, allies, and the general public. During this time, I received both physical and online death threats.

¹ Written testimony by Yana Gorokhovskaia of the Freedom House (September 12, 2023). Available on <https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/Yana%20Gorokhovskaia%20Testimony%20OTNR%202023.pdf>.



I also endured harassment and stalking, including being followed to my home and photographed on the streets.

The most menacing experience happened in August 2019 when the Boston Hong Kong community organized a march from the Massachusetts State House to Boston Chinatown. Before the march, the Chinese community in the area discussed showing up to the march to attack attendees. Some even said they planned to carry firearms to shoot me in the face. At the rally, we were confronted by hundreds to a thousand Chinese mainlanders, some of whom vandalized our belongings and covered up our faces with big PRC national flags. As I returned to my home after a very intense stand-off, a Chinese man followed me to my home, and I had to call the local police twice to interrupt.

In May 2023, the Department of Justice indicted a Chinese-American citizen in Massachusetts, one of the Chinese agents who were tasked with spying on my activities, for allegedly acting as an agent of China. In the full indictment, I learned that Chinese agents showed up at multiple events I organized; he took pictures and videos of me and other pro-democracy dissidents and sent them directly to Beijing officials. Other agents who assisted him had left the country before the government could act.

Last year, the Hong Kong authorities issued arrest warrants and HK\$ 1 million bounties (\$128,000) for the arrest of 13 overseas Hong Kongers — Including myself, five of the people are living in the U.S. Ever since that, the death threats I have received online have been unstoppable. Some of our immediate family members and even in-laws in Hong Kong have been detained for questioning and were used as a means to pass on threatening messages from the authorities to those of us living abroad. The CCP has often threatened relatives as a way of intimidating and silencing dissidents abroad; this tactic is now being used against Hong Kong pro-democracy activists.²

Transnational Repression Targeting Religious Faithful

In January 2024, the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation published a comprehensive report on religious freedom in Hong Kong titled “Hostile Takeover: The CCP and Hong Kong’s Religious Communities,” which details the CCP’s effort to assert control over Hong Kong’s religious sphere.³ Besides the CCP’s campaign of Sinicization of religions, Hong Kong’s religious groups are also facing threats of transnational repression.

² Department of Justice’s announcement: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/massachusetts-man-indicted-acting-illegal-agent-people-s-republic-china>. Full indictment document: <https://www.universalhub.com/images/2023/liang-indictment.pdf>.

³ “Hostile Takeover: The CCP and Hong Kong’s Religious Communities,” The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, January 28, 2024, <https://www.thecfhk.org/post/hostile-takeover-the-ccp-and-hong-kong-s-religious-communities>.



In April 2022, Father Vincent Woo, a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, went on the American Catholic TV network EWTN about how the CCP used “reeducation” and propaganda to stifle freedom of religion in China and Hong Kong. After the interview, due to the pressure he received from the Hong Kong authorities, Father Vincent has not since spoken publicly about the church in China. He finished his study in the U.S. last year but did not return to Hong Kong as planned. He is now serving as a priest in the U.S.

Additionally, the founder of Glorious Worship Ministry in Taiwan, Douglas Wang, said suspicious, unknown individuals were present in his church meeting. It’s common in China to find national security personnel sitting at the back of worship houses to intimidate churchgoers and clergy.

Transnational Repression Targeting American Diplomats

Transnational repression by the Hong Kong government extends beyond its own people. As Jimmy Lai’s trial continues, several foreign citizens have been named as co-conspirators, including Ambassador James Cunningham, the board chair of my organization, the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, and a former U.S. consul general to Hong Kong.⁴ China also threatened three other former U.S. consul generals to Hong Kong and the current consul general, Gregory May, that they might be guilty of contempt of court after they voiced concerns over the city’s liberties and Jimmy Lai’s trial.⁵

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices

In the last decade, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETOs) have been acting as an extended arm of the Hong Kong government in the surveillance and intimidation of Hongkongers living in the U.S., particularly in the DC area.

A report published by the Hong Kong Democracy Council found that at least one instance, Hong Kongers in the DC area have been questioned by HKETO officials attempting to gather

⁴ “Jimmy Lai trial resumes, Chairman of CFHK Foundation, James Cunningham named as co-conspirator along with several foreign citizens,” The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, January 2, 2024, <https://www.thecfhk.org/post/jimmy-lai-trial-resumes-chairman-of-cfhk-foundation-james-cunningham-named-as-co-conspirator-along>.

⁵ “Hong Kong gov’t slams ‘slanderous’ US ex-envoys’ statement of ‘dismay and concern’ over Jimmy Lai security law trial,” Hong Kong Free Press, February 9, 2024, <https://hongkongfp.com/2024/02/09/hong-kong-govt-slams-slanderous-us-ex-envoys-statement-of-dismay-and-concern-over-jimmy-lai-security-law-trial/>.



information about activists in the U.S.⁶ At a protest outside of the HKETO building in DC, Hong Kongers were photographed by individuals inside of the building.

The HKETOs also have a long-time campaign to advance pro-CCP narratives in the U.S. They have spent millions to billions of dollars in American lobbying to influence policies in Washington and write to major American media outlets to smear activists and whitewash the behavior of the Hong Kong government. In the past two years, they have sent at least 18 such letters to the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg News to slander and discredit overseas dissidents.

Impeding Threats of Article 23 Legislation

These instances reflect a trend of the CCP trying to control free speech across borders. But it doesn't end with mere intimidation.

Two weeks ago, the Hong Kong government proposed a new national security law — known as Article 23 legislation — to target espionage, state secrets, and foreign influence. This piece of legislation will prohibit seven types of offences – treason; secession; sedition; subversion against the central government; theft of state secrets; foreign bodies' conducting political activities in the city; and local bodies establishing ties with foreign bodies. State secret, by China's definition, is one of the core mechanisms it uses for controlling the flow of information. Business information, criticism against the government, corruption, government disclosure, et cetera, are all state secrets that can be suppressed and punished if exposed.

International non-governmental organizations with bases in Hong Kong, including those of apolitical nature, religious bodies like the Catholic Church, and missionaries in Hong Kong, will be affected. They will likely have to localize their operations and compromise their communication with their foreign bases. This brings questions to whether the Catholic Church in Hong Kong will have to sever its ties with the Vatican and follow the path of the Church in China, where priests are forced to join the state-controlled Patriotic Association and take oaths of fidelity to the government.

This new law will facilitate the Hong Kong government in carrying out transnational repression against overseas activists. Once enacted, the Department of Justice is authorized to revoke the passports of individuals, allowing the government to abuse INTERPOL to hunt down dissidents in exile like me. In 2017, Turkish government revoked 230,000 passports to circumvent the extradition process through INTERPOL and to evade INTERPOL's controls of Notices and Diffusions.

⁶ “The Counter-Lobby Confidential: How Beltway Insiders Do the Hong Kong Government's Bidding,” Hong Kong Democracy Council, July 2023, <https://www.hkdc.us/the-counter-lobby-confidential>.



Article 23 also makes it a crime to conceal any information about "fugitives," meaning family and friends of activists will have to disclose any information about them to the police under penalty of prosecution.

In the past three years, we have seen how the national security law has crushed the city's freedom and human rights. This new legislation will further double down on the repression of civic freedoms by introducing steeper penalties and expanding cases. I strongly encourage the US to pay immediate attention to this law before the consultation period ends at the end of this month. We need the international community to respond to this with concerns and actions. The US must coordinate with the international communities and civil society to respond to this with opposition and a list of collective actions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Hong Kong government and the CCP's acts of transnational repression are not only a violation of international treaties and Hong Kong's Basic Law, but also a threat to the territorial sovereignty of other nations and fundamental human rights.

To counter the CCP's transnational repression and protect those of us who have sought safety here, a stronger and more robust response is needed by the U.S. This government should

1. **Make full use of its sanction authorities to hold bad actors accountable for intimidating and threatening overseas Hong Kongers.** This includes NSL judges and prosecutors in Hong Kong who are responsible for allowing the issuance of arrest warrants and bounties, as well as putting people in jail with unjust sentencing. Members of Congress in both houses should support the bipartisan Hong Kong Sanction Act (H.R. 6153) introduced in this congress to provide for a review of sanctions on 49 Hong Kong officials, judges, and prosecutors.⁷
2. **Make its concern for the CCP's transnational repression a priority in any diplomatic engagements with Chinese counterparts.**
3. **Broaden multilateral cooperation among allies on Hong Kong and China.** Allies and partners should coordinate sanctions efforts, refugee relief, and political prisoner advocacy to achieve a stronger and more comprehensive response to the challenges facing Hong Kong. The United Kingdom, European Union member states, Japan, and Australia all play a crucial role in supporting U.S. efforts to hold the CCP and Hong Kong authorities accountable.

⁷ Bill text available online: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6153?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%22%7D&s=1&r=1>



4. **Provide training on transnational repression for government officials, including federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities.** This will ensure officials are well-equipped with sufficient knowledge and make informed decisions in cases of handling transnational repression in their local communities. **Advance coordination between federal and local law enforcement units to protect people at risk more consistently and efficiently.**
5. **Proactively encourage INTERPOL not to implement any requests by authoritarian regimes to target political dissidents.** After the first issuance of bounties in July 2023, Interpol said that it has not received a “Red Notice” from Hong Kong, nor can it act over political offenses based on a “Red Notice.” INTERPOL should ensure that the same commitment is extended to cooperation requests from other INTERPOL member countries.
6. **Pass the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices Certification Act. The** HKETOs, as an avenue for the Hong Kong and Chinese governments to monitor the activities of overseas Hong Kongers here in the U.S., should be closed. The PRC should not enjoy two diplomatic representations in the U.S., given that Hong Kong does not enjoy the "high degree of autonomy" that the PRC promised.

I want to also thank the co-chairs for introducing the Transnational Repression Policy Act (H. R. 3654), which covers some of the suggestions above. The CFHK Foundation supports the legislation, and we look forward to seeing it passed into law.

As I come forward to share these personal stories of mine and what the Hong Kong community has endured, I want to reaffirm to this Commission that the CCP’s attempt to silence me will only become fuel for my advocacy. I will continue to speak up, to protect my community and advocate for those who are unjustly put behind bars. Let’s work together to find ways to support and protect people in the U.S. who are at risk of repression by authoritarian regimes. I appreciate the Commission's efforts to shine a light on this issue, and I look forward to your questions.