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Human rights abuses still taking place in Hong Kong

Parliamentarians should ensure that the UK government honours its commitment to develop and implement a regime to impose sanctions on human rights abusers.

In 2012, the US introduced the [Magnitsky Act](#), designed to punish individual perpetrators of, and those who profit from, human rights abuses and crimes in foreign countries by freezing their assets and preventing them from entering the US. Dozens of human rights abusers are now covered by this and subsequent legislation (including the [Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act 2019](#)).

The UK already has significant powers to restrict offenders under the [Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018](#), but there is currently no regime to exercise them. We are asking that the government honours its [manifesto](#) commitment to “*further develop an independent Magnitsky-style sanctions regime to tackle human rights abusers head on*” and that the regime includes events in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong: entrenched brutal repression instead of a political response

The Chinese government, through the administration led by Carrie Lam, the Chief



Executive of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Police Force, have responded with brutal repression to

what were initially peaceful protests for freedom, autonomy and democracy. Since June 2019, the Hong Kong government has systematically suppressed freedom of speech, assembly and association through a combination of police intimidation and brutality, state-sanctioned extrajudicial attacks on civilians, arbitrary and unrestrained emergency administrative measures and political prosecutions. The most recent manifestations of this have been arrests of

peaceful pro-democracy campaigners and attempts to undermine the independent judiciary.

There have been savage beatings and mass arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters, aid personnel and journalists; misuse of weapons such as batons, teargas, water cannons, beanbag rounds and even live rounds, which have caused blindness and severe bodily harm to protesters and journalists.

The Hong Kong government has used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to clamp down on protest, through the excessive enforcement of so-called public health measures. In reality, it was Hongkongers uniting in solidarity to wear masks and proactively engage in social distancing, rather than the delayed response of the Hong Kong government, that warded off the worst of the virus. Now, people are being punished for exercising their civil liberties, at a moment when the world is distracted by the pandemic.

Despite thinly veiled threats of retribution from Beijing, Hongkongers had reiterated their demand for political change by ushering in a landslide victory to the pro-democracy camp in the November 2019 District Council elections. Hongkongers do not have genuine universal suffrage beyond these local elections. The Legislative Council is partially elected through professional groups while the Chief Executive is elected by a circa.1200-strong committee.

The pro-democracy movement is a legitimate response to the failure of the Chinese and Hong Kong governments to deliver on the commitments enshrined in the [1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration](#), which is a legally binding international treaty lodged with the United Nations.

China has made many moves against Hongkongers' rights and freedoms since the



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handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Promises to introduce universal suffrage have not been honoured; dissidents have been arbitrarily arrested or “disappeared”, tortured and subject to forced confessions in the Mainland; the independent legislative power of Hong Kong was circumvented by the Chinese government’s abuse of the power of interpretation of the Basic Law; judges have been pressured by critics and by Chinese government-backed media; elected legislators were disqualified; activists have been banned from running as candidates in elections. Notably, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee was barred by China from entering Hong Kong in 2014 and this disturbing trend of barring entry of human rights observers and activists into Hong Kong has worsened over time.

Lack of accountability for police brutality

Despite the indiscriminate use of force against Hongkongers, senior officials have repeatedly ruled out a full, independent inquiry into increasingly aggressive police tactics toward pro-democracy demonstrators. A panel of foreign experts overseeing an investigation into allegations of excessive force used by the Hong Kong police force stepped down in December 2019, after discussions with the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) failed to result in “any agreed process” through which the IPCC would be able to conduct an effective and truly independent investigation.

The nature and levels of violence displayed by the Hong Kong Police Force have contravened national and international law. As documented through months of footage, police guidelines are routinely ignored by officers, who have misused chemical agents and used excessive force against protesters (e.g. continued beating of subdued individuals). Extremely serious allegations (e.g. gang rape of an under-age teenager within a police station, torture during detention) have been levelled against the police and they are not seen to be investigated with any transparency or credibility by the government. Thus far, no officer has been charged, prosecuted, or suspended over their conduct and behaviour in the line of duty. Instead, the Hong Kong government revised their

guidelines to lower the threshold for lethal use of force; for example, ahead of planned protests coinciding with China’s National Day on 1st October 2019. The [All Party Parliamentary Group on Hong Kong](#) is conducting [an inquiry](#) into ‘Possible human rights abuses of humanitarian and medical workers’ and will soon document their findings in a wide-ranging report.

An environment where police and officials can use violence against those wishing to promote democratic freedoms is intolerable. There need to be clear consequences for these actions. Given Britain’s historical responsibility to Hong Kong, it must act to ensure that there is justice and accountability for human rights abuses

When will the Government bring forward its proposed regime for Magnitsky style sanctions?

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About “Fight for Freedom. Stand with Hong Kong.”

We are a completely independent, grassroots, crowdfund-initiated group of individuals who have come together to fight for freedom and democracy for Hong Kong. Our members come from all walks of life and are united with a shared vision.

In the past 22 years, we have witnessed China’s erosion of Hongkongers’ fundamental freedoms, human rights, and rule of law. China’s conduct has been in breach of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration—a legally binding treaty—which also forms the basis of the 1992 US Hong Kong Policy Act. Shocked and heartbroken at the recent events in Hong Kong and our government’s intransigence, we seek to mobilise the international community to stand with us in our fight for freedom.

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