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CALD strongly condemns the recent spate of arrests of pro-democracy activists and supporters in Hong Kong

The Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) strongly condemns the arrests of pro-democracy activists and supporters in Hong Kong as they appear to be in contravention of fundamental freedoms of speech and assembly.

Last 28 February, senior supporters of the pro-democracy movement Jimmy Lai, 71 years old, founder of Next Media that publishes Apple Daily newspaper, Lee Cheuk-yan, 63 years old, vice-chairman of the Labour Party, and Yeung Sum, 72 years old, former chairman of the Democrat Party, were arrested for taking part in an unauthorized demonstration on 31 August 2019.

This was followed by the arrests of more than a hundred people on 1 March on allegations of taking part in unauthorized assemblies, possession of offensive weapons and instruments fit for unlawful purpose, arson, attacking police officers and obstructing them in the execution of their duties.

This recent spate of arrests came weeks after 24 human rights organizations released an open letter to Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam imploring her to cease criminal investigations of human rights observers who were carrying out their legitimate functions during the protests in recent months.

CALD is concerned that these arrests constitute lawfare – the selective use of law enforcement for political purposes – which is against Hong Kong's international human rights obligations, and its reputation as a society governed by the rule of law.

CALD is alarmed by the Hong Kong administration's continued intimidation of people who are just freely expressing concern on issues such as repeal of the extradition law, implementation of the Basic Law and respect for the principle of "one country, two systems."

These recent arrests are a further blow to Hong Kong administration's deteriorating international reputation, especially since they came at a time when the government's effectiveness in handling the COVID-19 epidemic is being put into serious question.

In the wake of the ongoing health and political crises, the Hong Kong administration must be proactive and constructive in its approach, resist authoritarian influence, and start listening to the people's demands and aspirations.

The Hong Kong Government must immediately stop its acts of political persecution and, instead, resort to a peaceful process of resolution and inclusive dialogue with the people to secure an acceptable compromise, taking into account the five demands of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

CALD believes that no amount of threat, intimidation or imprisonment can silence the people's call for freedom and democracy. It urges the Hong Kong Government to stop the arrests of pro-democracy activists and supporters, free the political detainees, and start functioning as the government of the people that respects the basic human rights to free speech, expression, and assembly.

For the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats:

Bi-Khim Hsiao
Chairperson

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