



Joint Statement of LI, FNF, CALD and ALDE Party

Hong Kong's clampdown on the opposition is its other pandemic

As the world struggles to contain the COVID-19 virus, the Hong Kong administration unleashes another 'pandemic' on the leaders of the political opposition and their supporters.

Today, April 18, key members of the political opposition, including Liberal International (LI) and Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) Individual Member, Martin Lee, and CALD Individual Member, Chung-kai Sin, have been arrested on charges that they participated in organizing unlawful assemblies on August 18, October 1 and October 20 last year.

These arrests are the latest in a recent spate of opposition attacks instigated by the Hong Kong administration. In late February this year, senior supporters of the pro-democracy movement were also arrested for taking part in an allegedly unauthorized demonstration on August 31. This was subsequently followed by the arrests of more than a hundred people on various charges including 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.

LI, FNF, CALD and ALDE Party strongly believe that these arrests, which have been undertaken in the midst of the global health pandemic, are nothing but cold-blooded political persecution and a direct attack on fundamental freedoms of speech and assembly, which the Hong Kong administration pledged and claimed to uphold.

Those arrested, it must be emphasized, were just freely expressing legitimate concerns on issues such as repeal of the extradition law and implementation of the Basic Law. They did not advocate violence nor call for the unlawful overthrow of the current administration. They exercised their right to responsible and legitimate dissent, which is in line with the goal of making government effective in its functions and responsive to the needs of the people it serves.

Furthermore, LI, FNF, CALD and ALDE Party are concerned that these arrests are also being used to divert the Hong Kong people's attention on the incumbent administration's seeming inefficiency in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. By making these arrests, the administration could be avoiding accountability and evading scrutiny of its abysmal performance that led to the second wave of COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong.

All over the world, the pandemic is increasingly used by authoritarians and populists to further centralize political power, and in the process, attack the political opposition. The Hong Kong administration appears to follow this authoritarian playbook, which further taints its already questionable reputation, both domestically and internationally, as a society governed by the rule of law.

In the wake of the ongoing health and political crises, LI, FNF, CALD and ALDE Party implore the Hong Kong administration to be proactive and constructive in its approach, resist authoritarian influence, and start listening to the five demands of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The Hong Kong administration must, without delay, stop political persecution by dropping all the charges against those arrested in relation to the recent protests, immediately releasing those who are still in detention, and cease from committing further acts that intimidate, harass and threaten the political opposition.

The Hong Kong people have already suffered enough due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Do not make their situation worse by curtailing the fundamental freedoms that they hold dear.



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