



**Joint letter of organisations and Hong Kong diaspora groups on the anniversary of Article 23
and UK's obligation to protect activists from transnational threats**

Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street London
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London

19 March 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

Today marks the first anniversary of the passing of the repressive Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23 (officially the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance), through which the Government is crushing the right to freedom of expression in Hong Kong. It also fuels and aggravates transnational repression threatening Hong Kong human rights activists on UK soil.

The Hong Kong government has persisted over the last year to claim that its national security architecture, including both Article 23 and the pre-existing 2020 National Security Law (NSL) allows for extraterritorial jurisdiction over diaspora Hongkongers, and has taken a range of steps to continue to intimidate overseas dissidents and journalists. The most significant examples of this are the arrest warrants and HK\$1m (£105,000) bounties issued against 19 exiled Hong Kong campaigners, at least seven of whom live in the UK. Although the arrest warrants were made based on alleged offences of the 2020 NSL, the Hong Kong government imposed additional penalties on some wanted activists, under Article 23, which included cancelling their passports and banning them from any financial dealings in Hong Kong. Their family members and friends in Hong Kong were also taken by the police for "assisting investigations". In addition to the ongoing prosecutions and convictions linked to the 2020 NSL and British colonial-era seditious offences, Article 23 further endangers Hongkongers in the UK.

The targeting of Hongkongers in the UK demands urgent attention and coordinated action across UK government departments to ensure Hong Kong activists, journalists and the wider community are properly protected from the long arm of Hong Kong and Chinese government repression.

Amnesty International UK and the undersigned 20 organisations and diaspora community groups together with 7 wanted exiled Hong Kong activists in the UK, call on you to ensure that the UK government:

- 1) Recognises and responds to transnational repression as a human rights issue and works with the individuals and communities at risk, alongside civil society, on a national strategy which provides systematic protection and support for those affected;
- 2) Uses bilateral and multilateral including United Nations mechanisms to urge the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities to repeal Article 23 and other repressive laws that violate international human rights law and enable the ongoing repression of activists beyond their borders;
- 3) Establishes a dedicated reporting mechanism and a hotline to handle reports and complaints related to transnational repression on UK soil in languages that affected individuals can comfortably read, write and speak;
- 4) Ensures that alleged incidents of transnational repression are effectively investigated, and that related criminal acts are prosecuted where appropriate.
- 5) Ensures all frontline law enforcement agencies, including the Police and Border Force, have a good understanding of transnational repression and its effect on individuals and communities, including by allocating more resources and ensuring greater capacity and a more consistent approach across the UK to safeguard those affected.
- 6) Tracks, documents and publicises incidents and patterns of transnational repression on UK soil regularly.

The UK government has acknowledged that Hong Kong's implementation of Article 23 undermines its binding international obligations including under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Since Article 23 came into force on 23 March 2024, 16 individuals have been arrested, all under its sedition provisions. None of them was accused of engaging in violence. Three of those defendants were convicted for acts of peaceful activism, including wearing a T-shirt and a mask printed with protest slogans, expressing online political comments critical of the government, and writing protest slogans on bus seats.

As host to the largest exiled population of Hongkongers, the UK government has made commitments to supporting members of the Hong Kong community and reiterated "their continued safety remains a priority". However, compared to countries such as the USA and Canada, the UK has been slow to establish the necessary policies and institutional awareness in response to transnational repression of hostile states.

In November 2022, the UK government established the Defending Democracy Taskforce, which it said would work across government and parliament to review UK's approach to foreign

interference and transnational repression. However, to date, it is unclear what actions, if any have been undertaken by the Taskforce.

The UK government also lacks a dedicated reporting mechanism, helpline or online platform where victims of transnational repression, their families, witnesses and NGOs can safely report cases and access support. There is also no official documentation of incidents and patterns of transnational repression on UK soil, that is available to the members of public. It makes it particularly challenging for civil society to monitor the situation and develop its own risk assessments and mitigation plans based on credible official data.

We urge the UK government to take action to stop transnational repression and its chilling effect on UK soil.

Signatories:

Wanted exiled Hong Kong activists based in the UK

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Organisations (according to alphabetical order)

Amnesty International UK

Assembly of Citizens' Representatives, Hong Kong

Beijing Yirenping Center

Bonham Tree Aid CIC

China Dissent Network

Democracy for Hong Kong (D4HK)

Fight for Freedom. Stand with Hong Kong (SWHK)

Guildford Hongkongers

Hong Kong Aid

Hong Kong Centre for Human Rights

Hong Kong Democracy Council

Hong Kong Watch

Hongkongers in Britain

Hongkongers in Leeds

Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor

NGO DEI

Reading UK Stands with HK

Reporters Without Borders

Re-Water CIC

Sutton Hong Kong Culture and Arts society

The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation