

Hong Kong civil servants to take to the streets in extradition bill protest, piling pressure on embattled government

Tuesday 30 July 2019, by [CHUNG Kimmy](#), [LAM Jeffie](#), [LUM Alvin](#) (Date first published: 29 July 2019).

Unprecedented rally scheduled (Friday August 2) in Central is expected to draw 2,000 people

Organisers are pressing beleaguered chief executive to respond to protesters' demands

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Hong Kong's civil servants, known for their unflappable professionalism and political neutrality, plan to take to the streets over the government's now-abandoned extradition bill, piling pressure on the city's embattled leader to address protesters' demands.

The **unprecedented rally**, scheduled for **Friday 2** at Chater Garden in Central, is **expected to draw 2,000 government workers** and other demonstrators.

Michael Ngan Mo-chau, one of the rally organisers

"We concur with the principle that political neutrality should be upheld by civil servants when performing duties, but it doesn't mean that we are deprived of the right to make our voice heard on political issues or social injustice," Michael Ngan Mo-chau, one of the rally organisers who works in the Labour Department, said on Friday.

"Because underneath our uniform, we are also citizens of Hong Kong."

The rally was announced after a group of administrative officers – elite civil servants who form the backbone of the Hong Kong government – executive officers and government lawyers separately issued letters urging Lam to order an independent inquiry into the extradition saga and the civil unrest it triggered.

Ngan said his group intended to rally peacefully and urge Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor to rebuild the people's trust in the government by responding to the **five demands** made by protesters who have been taking to the streets for weeks – to :

- **fully withdraw the extradition bill,**
- **order an investigation into the use of force by police at protests,**
- **retract the "riot" classification of the clashes between police and protesters on June 12,**
- **drop charges against all arrested demonstrators,**
- **relaunch the stalled electoral reform process.**

There was no further plan for strike action, Ngan added.

The Civil Service Code does not stop most of the government workforce from joining political activities or groups, but still requires them to avoid any conflict of interest under the general principle of political neutrality. The only blanket prohibition applies to key policymakers including directorate-level staff, administrative officers and information officers.

However, it is extremely rare for any group from the 170,000- strong government workforce to hold a public rally over political issues.

Leung Chau-ting, chairman of the Federation of Civil Service Unions

Leung Chau-ting said it was time for the government to respond and act on calls from the public as well as its own employees.

"If the government continues to sit on it, it will deepen polarisation within the administration," Leung said, suggesting the proper way out would be a commission of inquiry into the entire saga, despite police associations' strong opposition.

Steven Wong Hung-lok, Senior Government Officers Association chairman

However, Steven Wong Hung-lok said he was personally worried that the rally could affect public perception of civil servants' neutrality.

"In the past, it was rare for civil servants to emphasise their position, but it seems the Friday rally will be no different to other rallies by other groups," Wong said.

He urged the Civil Service Bureau to engage with unions and other relevant bodies to properly channel the calls from within, so as to avoid *"civil servants having disputes with the government through the media"*.

Senior civil servants

There were mixed reactions among senior civil servants as to whether they should join, with some debating the impact of taking to the streets and their duty to help shape policymaking.

"The issue is more about collusion between police and triad gangs, which is not a political issue but touches on a core value of Hong Kong," said one government lawyer who asked to remain anonymous. *"But I still have to attend court hearings and continue to serve the public. We don't want the public to perceive any government lawyer as biased or unprofessional."*

He and some others were planning to wear masks to avoid being identified by supervisors, police or the general public.

After meeting police on Friday afternoon, Ngan said he was confident of getting a letter of no objection, despite two recent marches being banned by the force over the risk of violence.

"The nature of the rally is very moderate and peaceful. We don't want to see any clashes," he stressed, adding that 50 to 80 volunteers would act as marshals to maintain order on Friday.

Links

- [1] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3019979/hong-kong-civil-servants-set-lennon-wall-policy-innovation>
- [2] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020206/one-seven-hong-kongs-elite-civil-servants-call-carrie-lam>
- [3] https://cdn.i-scmp.com/sites/default/files/d8/images/methode/2019/07/29/3327c4f8-b1e6-11e9-8f9c-a6398a9f90a9_image_hires_214951.jpg
- [4] https://cdn.i-scmp.com/sites/default/files/d8/images/methode/2019/07/29/338e2ebe-b1e6-11e9-8f9c-a6398a9f90a9_image_hires_214951.jpg

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<https://scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020538/hong-kong-civil-servants-take-streets-extradition-bill>