

Hong Kong protests: heavy jail sentences for rioting will not solve city's political crisis, former Civil Human Rights Front convenor says

Thursday 1 August 2019, by [CHUNG Kimmy](#) (Date first published: 1 August 2019).

Johnson Yeung among 49 people arrested on Sunday night and held for 48 hours at Kwai Chung Police Station
He describes scenes of distress in jail as first detainee revealed rioting charge and accuses police of abusing their power

Throwing young protesters behind bars on rioting charges will not solve Hong Kong's political crisis, a former convenor of the city's annual pro-democracy march has said, recalling how some of the 43 defendants remained undeterred after their arrests.

Johnson Yeung Ching-yin, from the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), was among 49 people arrested during Sunday's protest - deemed illegal as it had not received police approval - in Central and Western district on Hong Kong Island.

Yeung was one of four people released on bail without charge, pending further inquiries, **but 43 other protesters** - most of them under 30 and including 13 students - became the first batch of participants of the extradition bill demonstrations to be **formally charged for rioting** [1], an offence punishable by 10 years' imprisonment.

One failed to show in court and a warrant has been issued for her arrest.

"The government is trying to deter protesters with heavy rioting charges ... but it only shows the government is not going to reconcile with society and solve the political crisis," Yeung said on a radio programme on Thursday morning.

"We have to use every means possible to let the government know we will not be scared and retreat."

Among those charged with rioting was a couple who will get married on Sunday. They were only at the scene helping a girl who fell to the ground, their lawyer said on Wednesday.

Barrister Billy Li On-yin, convenor of the Progressive Lawyers' Group, said those who took part in the protest but did not act violently could still be charged with rioting, saying the key was whether one was believed to have been part of an unlawful assembly.

Under the Public Order Ordinance, anyone taking part in an unlawful assembly that constitutes a breach of the peace, is seen as being riotously assembled.

Yeung was held in custody with other protesters at Kwai Chung Police Station for 48 hours, and recalled most were only notified they would be charged with rioting, not the lighter charge of taking part in unlawful assembly, after more than 40 hours.

"The prison turned dead silent after the first one came out and shouted 'rioting'," Yeung said, describing the scene as detainees were taken from the cells one by one to be informed of the charges they would face.

"Some were weeping, saying: 'What am I going to do? I am only 20.'" Yeung said, his voice trembling.

"Being charged for rioting means the youngsters will probably be locked up for five to 10 years ... I feel the authorities are trying to spread white terror to deter us."

Though many feared for their future, Yeung said others remained strong and vowed not to back down and to continue taking part in lawful rallies and protest marches.

Yeung pointed out protesters arrested during the Mong Kok riot in 2016 [2] had still returned to the streets for recent demonstrations.

"We should not allow the government to deprive youngsters their freedom like this," Yeung said.

"The government needs to solve its own political crisis. The solution is not to throw everyone behind bars."

He called on people to stay unified and voice their opposition against the government by every means possible, through joining strikes [3] and peaceful rallies.

Recounting his 48 hours in custody, Yeung also accused the police force of abusing their power.

The protesters were ordered to sit on hard plastic chairs in an indoor car park with poor ventilation for more than 20 hours, he said, with demands to call families rejected for too long.

Links

[1]

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020736/hong-kong-protesters-riot-charges-set-be-released-bail-some>

[2] <https://www.scmp.com/topics/mong-kok-riot>

[3]

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020850/hong-kong-bankers-join-call-citywide-strike-over-handling>

P.S.

<https://scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020905/hong-kong-protests-heavy-jail-sentences-rioting-will-not>