

Hong Kong national security law: future of city's localist movement hangs in balance as groups disband, activists quit or flee city

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Demosisto folds as co-founder Joshua Wong announces decision to leave party along with several associates Hong Kong National Front and Studentlocalism take fight abroad as they end operations in city.

The fate of Hong Kong's localist political groups was left hanging in the balance on Tuesday 30, as at least three shut their local branches soon after the national security law was passed by China's top legislative body.

- Opposition party **Demosisto disbanded** hours after Joshua Wong Chi-fung and several key members tendered their resignations, vowing to continue their political advocacy "*in a personal capacity*" on the day the legislation was due to take effect in the city.
- **The Hong Kong National Front and Studentlocalism also folded**, but said they would continue to operate overseas.

The announcement came soon after the National People's Congress Standing Committee unanimously passed the new law in Beijing.

While details of the law have yet to be made public, the legislation targets acts of secession, - subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces to endanger national security.

In a series of statements posted on their social media accounts after the law was passed, **former lawmaker Nathan Law Kwun-chung, as well as Agnes Chow Ting and Jeffrey Ngo Cheuk-hin also announced their departures from Demosisto**, which was formed in April 2016 after the Occupy movement two years before.

The young party had led efforts to lobby the international community over the city's autonomy and democratic development. Observers said **the group would be one of the prime targets under the new law**.

While their statements did not make it clear if they were leaving Hong Kong, both Joshua Wong and Nathan Law said they would defend the city until the final hour. The pair plan to run in the coming Legislative Council elections in September.

In a statement on Tuesday afternoon, Demosisto said it had immediately disbanded after it was informed of the resignations.

"Demosisto thinks it will be hard to continue its operations ... Members should continue to join the resistance in a more agile manner," it said.

In a short statement, **Joshua Wong**, 23, said he had resigned from his post as party secretary general and as a member.

"I will continue to defend my home, Hong Kong, until they silence and eliminate me from this land," Wong wrote.

Joshua Wong, who became a prominent figure for his role in the 2014 Occupy protests, also cited

threats from the national security law and military drills by the Chinese army's Hong Kong garrison, saying it was no longer a fallacy for activists to be concerned about their lives. He warned that activists could be interrogated at special facilities, or be extradited to the mainland, as well as face long jail sentences.

In another statement, **Agnes Chow**, a 23-year-old activist who has been focusing on the Japanese lobbying front, did not make clear if she would be leaving politics altogether. *"I will not be able to take part in the work connecting [Hong Kong] with the international community in the future,"* Agnes Chow wrote, adding she had *"no option"* but to leave the party she co-founded.

Chinese University political scientist Ma Ngok said the disbanding of Demosisto may be to protect its members, including ones that were not named in public. *"I think Demosisto perceive they are the target of suppression under the national security law,"* Ma said. *"They may think they are no different from Hong Kong independence advocates [to Beijing]."* Despite the move, Ma Ngok said Joshua Wong still had *"close to zero"* chance of being able to run in the Legco poll, as he was the only person disqualified during last year's district council elections.

Localist groups such as Youngspiration and Demosisto gained prominence in 2016 after successfully fielding three candidates for Legco, but soon suffered a setback after legislators - including Nathan Law - were disqualified for improper oath-taking. Ma Ngok conceded it was too early to assess the impact on Hong Kong's political landscape brought by the closure of localist groups. Meanwhile, the **pro-independence Hong Kong National Front** said it had disbanded in the city, but some members would continue to operate from Taipei and Britain.

Former lawmaker **Baggio Sixtus Leung** Chung-hang, 33, said he resigned as the group's spokesman, but told the Post on Tuesday he was not leaving the city. *"I want to tell Hongkongers that there will be people fighting on,"* Baggio Sixtus Leung said, adding it was difficult to tell if former members in Hong Kong could still be arrested.

Studentlocalism, another pro-independence group, also said all Hong Kong members had been dismissed and operations would be continued by supporters overseas.

Victoria Social Association, a small political coalition formed by politicians in Central and Western District, also suspended its operation.

Chow Sai-kit, the association's chairman and a former spokesman of **Youngspiration**, gave enactment of the new law as a reason to pause the group's activities, saying he was against Hong Kong independence and was willing to uphold the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution.

Pro-establishment heavyweight Tam Yiu-chung, who was present when the law was passed in Beijing, refused to say if activists who had quit the groups would still be arrested for threatening national security. *"At this stage I cannot speak about details of the law,"* Tam said.

Some members of Hong Kong's opposition camp have announced their departures from public life and politics over the past week, including former chief secretary Anson Chan Fang On-sang, and localist Horace Chin Wan-kan.

A vocal advocate for democratic reform in Hong Kong, Anson Chan, 80, said her decision was prompted by the recent death of her daughter.

Independence advocate Wayne Chan Ka-kui, of the **Hong Kong Independence Union**, had also confirmed on Sunday that he had jumped bail and fled the city. He called on his peers not to give up

their dreams of breaking away from China.

But opposition lawmakers, including the Democratic Party's Ted Hui Chi-fung, said they would not be leaving.

Ted Hui, 37, said his wife and family had urged him to go in light of the new law.

Apart from arrests, Hui cited the potential long jail sentences under the national security law as a threat to all members of the opposition.

"My family never expected that this would be what being a lawmaker entails," Hui said. "But it is like sports, when you're fit you should stay until the end of the match."

P.S.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3091183/hong-kong-national-security-law-future-citys-localist>