

Hong Kong group behind major pro-democracy protests disbands amid police pressure

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End of Civil Human Rights Front comes days after police suggested its past rallies may have violated national security law

A major civil society group that was behind some of Hong Kong's biggest protests has disbanded under increasing pressure from police.

The Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) announced its closure on Sunday, saying no members were willing to perform secretariat duties after its convenor, Figo Chan Ho-wun, was jailed for 18 months over a 2019 rally.

The 19-year-old umbrella organisation, which in the past had counted numerous political parties as members, has been a significant presence or organiser of protests in Hong Kong. For successive years it ran the annual 1 July protests, until authorities began to systematically deny permission to it and other rallies, citing the coronavirus.

"In the course of over a year, the government continuously used the pandemic as a reason to reject the demonstration applications of CHRF and other groups - each member group was oppressed, and civil society was facing unprecedented challenges," CHRF said in a statement [reported by local media](#).

"CHRF originally hoped to continue to face the challenge with everyone in the existing ways, but convenor Figo Chan is already in jail because of several cases, and the secretariat can no longer maintain its operations. With no members participating in the next secretariat, we can only begrudgingly announce our disbandment."

Chan, 25, was jailed in May alongside other high profile Hong Kong activists Lee Cheuk-yan, Jimmy Lai, Albert Ho and Leung "Long Hair" Kwok-hung, over their involvement in a protest on 1 October 2019, one of the hundreds of pro-democracy rallies held in Hong Kong that year, but which coincided with China's National Day.

That protest saw [violent clashes and chaos on the streets](#), with police using teargas and water cannon against protesters, some of whom [threw molotov cocktails and lit fires](#). An 18-year-old student was shot point-blank by a police officer.

The disbandment came just days after the police chief suggested that past rallies organised by the CHRF may have violated the national security law, despite the CHRF obtaining permits and repeated reassurances from authorities that the 13-month old law is not retroactive.

Police have been investigating CHRF's finances since April, and on Sunday the South China Morning

Post cited a government-connected source saying police would continue to pursue the group regardless of its dissolution.

In its Sunday statement CHRF thanked the people of Hong Kong for walking with them over the past two decades, which “allowed the world to see Hong Kong, allowed light to shine through darkness, and had sown the seed of democracy and freedom in people’s hearts”.

CHRF’s disbandment comes just days after Hong Kong’s largest teachers union also announced it was disbanding. Civil society and community groups are under increasing political pressure in the city, where authorities are continuing to crack down on anything which could be interpreted as dissent or anti-Beijing sentiment.

Last month, five members of a speech therapists’ union were [arrested over the publication of children’s books](#) about sheep trying to hold back wolves from their village. The books, which reportedly sought to explain the democracy movement to children, were accused of being seditious content.

The disbandment of the CHRF and the teachers union followed successive articles in China’s state media targeting the organisations.

“For any anti-China and trouble-making forces, it’s just a matter of time for them to court their own ruin,” China’s top state media People’s Daily said on Tuesday.

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The Guardian

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