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Hong Kong

China accuses UK of protecting 'fugitives' after bounty put on Hong Kong democracy activists

Thursday 6 July 2023, by [HAWKINS Amy](#) (Date first published: 4 July 2023).

Chinese embassy in London tells UK to 'stop interfering' in China's affairs, as Hong Kong leader says overseas activists will be 'pursued for life'

China has accused the UK of protecting fugitives after the British foreign secretary criticised Hong Kong's decision to offer HK\$1m bounties for the arrest of eight democracy activists based overseas, as the territory's leader said the group would be "pursued for life".

In a statement late on Monday, China's embassy in London said: "British politicians have openly offered protection for fugitives. This is crude interference in Hong Kong's rule of law and China's internal affairs."

The embassy called on British politicians to "stop using these anti-China Hong Kong disruptors to jeopardise China's sovereignty and security".

On Tuesday, Hong Kong leader John Lee told reporters that the only way for the activists to "end their destiny of being an abscondee who will be pursued for life is to surrender" and urged "them to give themselves up as soon as possible".

He said authorities would continue to "monitor" the actions and behaviour of the eight while overseas, without giving specifics on how authorities would do this. "We want them to know that we will not sit and do nothing."

In response to Hong Kong's accusations against the activists - some of whom are based in the Britain, UK foreign secretary James Cleverly had previously said London would "not tolerate any attempts by China to intimidate and silence individuals in the UK and overseas".

Hong Kong's national security law was brought in three years ago and grants authorities sweeping extraterritorial powers to prosecute acts or comments made anywhere in the world that it deems criminal. It is widely seen as a Beijing-backed tool of suppression, and was imposed after months of pro-democracy protests had engulfed the city.

Hong Kong chief executive John Lee

Hong Kong chief executive John Lee Photograph: Liau Chung-ren/ZUMA Press Wire/Shutterstock

More than 100,000 Hongkongers have emigrated to the UK since the British government opened a bespoke visa route for them in the wake of the national security law. Although the UK has suspended

its extradition treaty with Hong Kong, some Hongkongers feel that not enough is being done to ensure their safety in Britain.

On Monday, a consortium of Hong Kong groups published an open letter alleging that the UK government's flagship fund for helping community organisations to welcome new arrivals, the BN(O) Welcome Programme, was inadvertently directing funds towards groups with links to the Chinese Communist party.

Hong Kong police on Monday accused the eight activists of offences including foreign collusion and incitement to secession and offered a reward of HK\$1m (£100,700) per person for information leading to their arrest. The eight are based in various places, with at least three in the UK and other in the US and Australia

Lee, who was appointed as Hong Kong's chief executive last year with Beijing's blessing, previously oversaw the government's strong-handed response to the 2019 pro-democracy protests and the first year of its national security crackdown.

On Tuesday one of those targeted, an Australian citizen and lawyer Kevin Yam, vowed not to be silenced, saying he felt an obligation to jailed fellow pro-democracy activists "not to shut up". Yam, who has criticised the crackdown on dissent and erosion of judicial independence in Hong Kong, told Guardian Australia: "I kind of knew that this could happen one day - it is what it is.

"I owe it to all the friends and fellow activists who are currently in jail and are largely silenced not to shut up," said Yam, who is based in Melbourne.

"I'm lucky to do so in a democracy where the right to free speech is valued."

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Hong Kong: activist will 'never back down' despite bounty on her head - video

Another one of those targeted, Nathan Law, who was granted asylum in the UK, told the BBC he would have to be more vigilant as a result of the bounty's announcement.

"There could possibly be someone in the UK - or anywhere else - to provide informations of me to [the Hong Kong authorities]. For example, my whereabouts, where they could possibly extradite me when I'm transiting in certain countries," he said.

Earlier he tweeted that the charges were "classic examples of abusing the concept of 'national security', pushing its definition to an extreme to suppress dissident voices.

"If meeting foreign politicians, attending seminars & hearings are 'colluding with foreign forces', a lot of [Hong Kong] officials should be in legal trouble."

The US state department said the decision from Hong Kong police set "a dangerous precedent that threatens the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people all over the world."

The Australian government said it was "deeply disappointed" by the arrest warrants. The foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, said Australia had "consistently expressed concerns about the broad application of the national security law to arrest or pressure pro-democracy figures and civil society".

"Freedom of expression and assembly are essential to our democracy, and we will support those in

Australia who exercise those rights,” she said on Monday.

Aside from Yam and Law, those facing arrest are Anna Kwok, Finn Lau, Dennis Kwok, Ted Hui, Mung Siu-tat and Gong-yi, a group of high-profile pro-democracy activists, former lawmakers and legal scholars who are accused of continuing to violate the national security law while in exile.

Amy Hawkins *and agencies*

With Reuters

P.S.

- The Guardian. Tue 4 Jul 2023 04.57 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/may/12/my-time-in-uk-has-been-disaster-hongkongers-fear-deportation-after-years-left-in-limbo>

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