

Hong Kong moves to impose unprecedented ban on separatist party

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Hong Kong National party must explain why it should not be barred, in escalation of push to silence dissent against China

[Hong Kong](#) is taking unprecedented steps to ban a pro-independence party, in the government's strongest action yet against the movement pushing for separation from China.

Police on Tuesday delivered documents to the Hong Kong National party founder, Andy Chan Ho-tin, detailing their recommendations to the city's secretary of security that the group halt operations.

The development marks the first time since the former British colony's return to Chinese rule in 1997 that it has sought to outlaw a political organisation.

A letter addressed to Chan said security officials believed the party should be shut down "in the interests of national security or public safety, public order or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others", according to photos of the documents posted on the group's Facebook page.

In a press conference, the Hong Kong security secretary, John Lee, said if the party was banned, anyone who attends meetings or gives money to the group could be punished with a fine of HKD\$50,000 (\$6,400) and two years in jail.

"In Hong Kong we have freedom of association, but that right is not without restriction," he said, according to Hong Kong Free Press.

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John Lee

Chan, 27, a former Occupy Central activist who participated in a wave of pro-democracy protests in 2014, had already been barred from running in legislative elections in 2016. The party, started in 2016, calls for "an independent and free Republic of Hong Kong".

Chan has until 7 August to explain in writing why the party should not be banned, according to the documents. According to some, under the city's mini-constitution, independence is a violation of the "one country, two systems" framework under which Hong Kong has operated since its return to [China](#) from British control.

Under the system, Hong Kong is meant to operate under a "high degree of autonomy" with its own laws, courts, and freedoms. Critics say those freedoms are being erased.

The potential ban comes at a time when authorities are putting more pressure on pro-democracy groups, calling any support of independence illegal, a challenge to the Chinese communist party,

and a threat to national security. Candidates advocating a range of views, from calling for more self-determination for Hong Kong to all-out independence, have been [banned from running](#) or [arrested](#).

“The authorities must stop using vague laws to intimidate people who hold different political views. The attempt to ban the Hong Kong National party raises alarm bells as to what the government will look to curtail next in the name of national security,” said Patrick Poon, China researcher at Amnesty International.

The Hong Kong National party said on its Facebook page: “Today we Hong Kongers stand in opposition to our enemies, these Chinese colonisers and their puppets in the current Hong Kong government, and it is this antagonism that defines our movement.”

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The Guardian

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