



Statement concerning Hong Kong

On 3 July 2023, the Hong Kong authorities issued arrest warrants and offered a HK\$1 million reward or bounty for the arrest of 8 named individuals. This arises from the application of China's National Security Law for Hong Kong of 2020. Among the 8 persons issued with arrest warrants are 3 lawyers – legal scholar Kevin Yam, Ted Hui and Dennis Kwok. Mr Kwok was a previous recipient of the CLA Rule of Law Award.

While acknowledging that States have the right to pass legislation to protect the State and its people, the CLA considers that the National Security Law applicable in Hong Kong as draconian, oppressive and as an example of a law used for unlawful purposes to pursue individuals for exercising freedom of opinion and expression in the defence of the rule of law.

Freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental human right and is recognised as such in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 states '*..everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*'

The CLA considers that the Hong Kong authorities are using the National Security Law to stifle the right to freedom of opinion and expression which includes the right to receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers as expressed in Article 19. This will have a chilling effect on the exercise of this right and is therefore obverse to the rule of law.

The CLA condemns the issuing of a bounty in relation to the 8 individuals and considers the steps taken to be an authoritarian overreach by a State purporting to exercise legitimate legislative authority. The CLA also abhors the use of inflammatory language by the Hong Kong authorities, which demonizes the 8 individuals, and which could expose them to the peril of physical harm.

Accordingly, the CLA calls upon the Hong Kong authorities to fulfil their obligations under international law, to withdraw the bounties and arrest warrants against these 8 individuals and to uphold and respect the rule of law.

Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA)
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