

Fight for Freedom. Stand with Hong Kong – Written evidence (TRC0012)

International Relations and Defence Committee Inquiry into the UK's security and trade relationship with China A submission from Stand with Hong Kong

About Stand with Hong Kong

"[Fight for Freedom. Stand with Hong Kong.](#)" is an independent, grassroots, crowdfunded advocacy group consisting of individuals who have come together to fight for freedom and democracy for Hong Kong. SWHK members come from all walks of life and are united by a shared vision. Following the promulgation of the National Security Law in June 2020 by the Chinese Communist Party, we are now the only grassroots organisation representing the voice of Hongkongers operating in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.

Trade

1. Should the UK be seeking to increase trade with China? What considerations should underpin the Government's trade agenda with China (for example intellectual property protection, human rights etcetera)? Are these issues specific to China, or common to the UK's overall trade policy?

Consideration of human rights and rule of law should be high up on the Government's trade agenda with China. The 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto says: "We [The UK] will continue to be an outward-looking country that is a champion of collective security, **the rule of law, human rights**, free trade, anti-corruption efforts and a rules-based international system". It is important for the Government to follow its manifesto and show the world through policy that Britain will always be a force for good on the international stage. The UK must therefore use its influential position and not compromise on these values when establishing and developing political and economic agreements with other countries.

In recent years, China has demonstrated its complete disregard to its treaty obligation for Hong Kong, eroding freedoms, human rights, and rule of law in the city. The significance of the promulgation of the draconian National Security Law (NSL) is it curtailed any remaining elements of autonomy and democracy China once promised to Hongkongers. The NSL is a fundamental shift of China's policy to Hong Kong, abandoning any pretence of maintaining the true essence of 'One country, Two systems'. It also signals China's shift in its foreign policy, indicating China is becoming more confident the international society will not take tangible measures to respond to violation of its international treaty obligations.

Given Britain's role in negotiating, and as a co-signatory to, the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, it has a unique legal and moral responsibility to ensure China is adhering to the treaty and protecting the rights of Hongkongers. To demonstrate the country is truly global Britain, the UK should be doing more to defend human rights globally and maintain the international rules-based order. It is also important to hold the perpetrators of human rights abuses to account for their actions. The recent sanctions announced by the Foreign Secretary targeting Chinese officials who are responsible to the Uyghur genocide is a good beginning. It sent a clear message that Britain will defend humanity. As such, the Government should not enter into any trade agreements with the People's Republic or the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region unless there is significant evidence to suggest human rights conditions are met. Furthermore, when negotiating a trade agreement with China, the UK should insert human rights protection clauses, and devise policies specific to Hong Kong in order to halt and reverse the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy.

Moral clarity is very much needed in the Government approach to China. By considering human rights and the rule of law when strengthening the UK's economic relationship with China, the UK is sending a clear message that it not only stands with the people of Hong Kong, but the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China, where at least 1 million Uighurs have been interned since 2017 in more than 85 identified camps within the region, where they are facing genocide.

China's approach

1. What are the implications of China's pursuit of major international strategic initiatives (such as the Belt and Road Initiative) for the UK's foreign, development and security interests? Are these in conflict with, or compatible with, the UK's interests?

Since the handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China, the Chinese government has been taking systematic measures to dismantle Hong Kong's autonomy, and its effort has accelerated drastically after the promulgation of NSL. These measures result in erosion of political freedoms, human rights, and rule of law in Hong Kong. The Chinese Government is moving ruthlessly to restrict freedoms that had previously existed; to clamp down on freedom of speech, of the press, of association and of movement; and to destroy what limited democracy had previously been permitted. This is particularly evident following the decision by the National People's Congress in Beijing to bring in changes to the Hong Kong electoral system in March 2021.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration was meant to guarantee freedoms in Hong Kong for at least 50 years after the handover in 1997. China has breached this agreement on numerous occasions, and their blatant disregard for treaty obligations is in conflict with the UK's interests of championing human rights and rule of law on the world stage.

Therefore, the UK must consider using Magnitsky-style sanctions regime, or to target the Hong Kong and Chinese officials involved in these clear human rights violations, particularly since the promulgation of the National Security Law.

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