

Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of academic freedom – HKSAR Government rejects the baseless smears by the so-called Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) stated today (September 25) that it strongly condemned and rejected the report on the academic freedom of Hong Kong published by the so-called Human Rights Watch and Hong Kong Democracy Council yesterday (September 24). The content of the report are all maliciously smears and sweeping remarks. The HKSAR Government must point out its errors to set the record straight.

A spokesman for the HKSAR Government stressed, "The fundamental rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents have all along been guaranteed at the constitutional level by the Basic Law. HKSAR's laws to safeguard national security attach special importance to human rights. Both the Hong Kong National Security Law (HKNSL) and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) have clearly stipulated that human rights shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security in the HKSAR and that the rights and freedoms which the residents of Hong Kong enjoy under the Basic Law and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applied to Hong Kong shall be protected in accordance with the law. Any measures or enforcement actions taken under the relevant laws must observe the above principle.

"After the implementation of the HKNSL, Hong Kong residents continue to enjoy various rights and freedoms, including the freedom of academic research, literary and artistic creation and other cultural activities, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. According to Article 137 of the Basic Law, educational institutions of all kinds may retain their autonomy and enjoy academic freedom. Hong Kong residents can exercise their freedom of expression legitimately, including criticising government policies or decisions made by officials.

"The offences stipulated in the NSL and the SNSO clearly define their elements, penalties, exceptions and defences. These laws actively prevent, suppress and punish acts and activities that endanger national security, in accordance with the principle of the rule of law. Additionally, they target an extremely small minority of people and organisations that pose a threat to national security, while protecting the lives and property of the public. Law-abiding people including students, scholars, and other academics will not engage in acts and activities that endanger national security and will not unwittingly violate the law, and therefore have no reason to be worried."

The spokesman said, "We noticed that most of the interviewees of the so-called report have used pseudonyms, which is a tactics frequently adopted by anti-China forces, making it difficult to ascertain if the interviewees truly exist. Therefore, the authenticity and credibility of the so-called report is questionable."

As regard to the so-called report containing fabricated content and irresponsible remarks saying that academic freedom has declined in Hong Kong, the spokesman stressed, "Academic freedom is an important social value treasured in Hong Kong and the cornerstone of Hong Kong's higher education sector. The HKSAR Government attaches great importance to upholding academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which are both enshrined in the Basic Law. These safeguards are clear and specific, and their effectiveness has never changed. Since the implementation of the NSL, academics or post-secondary education institutions in Hong Kong continue to conduct normal exchange activities between their foreign or external counterparts."

The spokesman said, "National security is essential for the prosperity and stability of society as well as for its people to live and work in peace and contentment. Without security and stability, there is no way to talk about anything. We should not forget the painful experiences Hong Kong endured in 2019, including the riots in campuses that severely disrupted normal teaching and academic research."

The spokesman stressed, "Enacting laws safeguarding national security fully aligns with the principles of international law, international practice and common practice adopted in various countries and regions. It is both necessary and legitimate. The HKNSL and SNSO complement each other, providing a strong framework for safeguarding national security in Hong Kong. This allows all sectors, especially higher education, to flourish in a safe and stable environment, enabling scholars and students to pursue their studies and research in a stable, secure, and inclusive setting."

"The HKSAR Government is committed to developing Hong Kong into an international education hub and will continue to work closely with the higher education sector in capitalising on Hong Kong's strengths. Through various key initiatives, the Government will support expansion and quality enhancement of institutions, promote academic exchanges and research collaborations, and promote a more diversified campus culture, so as to enhance the competitiveness of the institutions and students in the globalised environment."

"In fact, over the years, Hong Kong's publicly-funded universities have continued to be highly rated in international rankings and among the best in Asia. In the World University Rankings 2025 published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), an international higher education organisation, five publicly-funded universities have stayed in the world's top 100, highlighting that Hong Kong's universities are highly reputable in the global academic community, with excellent performances in terms of quality of teaching and research, and internationalisation, thereby attracting experts and talent from around the world. At present, four University Grants Committee-funded universities are ranked among the top 10 most internationalised universities in the world."

"The HKSAR Government will continue to lead Hong Kong in fully focusing on development, improving people's livelihoods, and maintaining the long-term prosperity and stability of the city."