

Hong Kong firmly upholds freedoms and human rights

A Government spokesman stressed today (December 26) that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government attached "the utmost importance to and firmly upheld human rights and various freedoms" in Hong Kong.

"Despite the social unrest affecting Hong Kong over the past six months, freedoms and human rights have continued to be jealously guarded and remained a top priority of the Government. Along with the rule of law, a fiercely independent judiciary, a clean government, a level playing field for business, openness, diversity and inclusiveness, freedoms and human rights constitute our much-cherished core values which underpin Hong Kong's success," the spokesman said.

The spokesman was referring to media reports that an organisation – Stand With Hong Kong – had invited religious and faith leaders across the United Kingdom to sign a letter to the British Prime Minister and Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to urge the UK government to "urgently ensure the lives and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong are protected".

"We deeply deplore the move as it is absolutely unwarranted and grossly misguided. It also totally ignores the real situation of Hong Kong, let alone failing to do justice to our good track record on the protection of human rights and freedoms in this dynamic world metropolis. The fact is that freedoms and rights here have by no means been eroded at all in recent months.

"Specifically, we object vehemently to the organisation's remark that over the past six months, the people of Hong Kong 'have endured suppression of their basic freedoms and human rights in their fight for justice and democracy' and that Hong Kong people 'are routinely subjected to police brutality and state repression'.

"This is a patently groundless, insulting and malicious accusation which must be rejected outright. Nothing can be further from the truth."

The spokesman emphasised that the protection of human rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, of the press, of publication, of association and assembly, of procession and of demonstration; free flow of information; freedom of religious belief and free education; free flow of capital; and free trade and free port are all enshrined in the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance and other legislation. The provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as applied to Hong Kong before 1997 remain in force. The 50,000-plus public assemblies and processions held over the past five years testify to the freedoms enjoyed by our people.

"Indeed, Hong Kong has remained the world's freest economy for 25 years in a row since 1994, according to the Washington-based Heritage Foundation," he added.

"During the past six months, the vast majority of the requests for public meetings, processions and protests were given the green light by the Government. For requests not approved, it was generally a decision made in the hopes of preventing violence, ensuring peace and public order.

"It is important to point out the public protests against the extradition bill which began as largely peaceful and orderly marches in June soon spiralled out of control into a highly violent and disorderly campaign. This was despite the fact that the bill was formally withdrawn in October.

"Unprecedented violence, reckless and organised destruction became the norm. Radical activists attacked police officers and facilities with petrol bombs, iron bars, bricks and chemicals. Some 8,000 petrol bombs were found from two local university campuses. Public infrastructure and transport are repeatedly vandalised, with the Cross-Harbour Tunnel paralysed for two weeks. Also targeted are countless shops, restaurants and shopping malls which apparently did not side with the radical activists. Even HSBC and Starbucks have been targeted. Innocent members of the public with a dissenting voice were severely and glaringly attacked in streets. What is more, intimidation and doxxing through social media of senior government officials, police officers and their families as well as other outspoken individuals have been rampant. Earlier this month, the so-called "freedom fighters" vandalised and threw petrol bombs at the Court of Final Appeal and High Court – our edifices symbolising the rule of law," the spokesman elaborated.

"These unlawful and violent acts must be condemned, curbed and ended if Hong Kong is to continue as a vibrant international financial, business and logistics hub. As in any society that believes in the rule of law, it is incumbent on our police force to maintain public safety and order.

"Contrary to their claims to be campaigning for freedom, the radicals and violent protesters have openly joined hands to undermine the rights and freedoms of those who do not agree with them and attack the rule of law in an organised fashion."

The spokesman concluded, "For a long time, Hong Kong has always enjoyed the full substance of real freedoms – the envy of many other economies. This is one of the success factors which make Hong Kong tick and propel us forward. The HKSAR Government will ensure that this crucial attribute is well preserved and safeguarded."