



ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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HONG KONG: Hong Kong SAR Administration Should Respond *Now* and Scrap Article 23 Legislation

2 July 2003

AS-23-2003

A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission - AHRC

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) renews its earlier demand to the administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to drop its proposed national security laws to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-Constitution. The protest march yesterday was a clear message that the majority of people in the HKSAR are seriously concerned and opposed to the proposed national security laws. AHRC seriously urges the HKSAR administration to heed the people's opposition to the Article 23 legislation and assure the people of Hong Kong by abandoning the proposed legislation altogether. The more than half a million people who took to the streets to protect their rights are justifiably worried, unhappy and feel insecure due to the pending legislation. The persistence of these insecure feelings will cause enormous damage to the stability of the HKSAR because of the government's failure to heed the voice of the people, who need a response from the HKSAR administration NOW!

Hong Kong's people chose the sixth anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the PRC to stage the largest protest in the city in 14 years. The people who protested came from all walks of life, from children to the elderly, to brave the blazing summer heat, most wearing black T-shirts, to express their growing dissatisfaction with the Hong Kong government. The groups who joined the protest included many professionals, such as doctors and health care workers, journalists, teachers, academics and lawyers. There were also many other groups, such as students, the disabled and the blind. More importantly, there were hundreds of thousands of members of the general public who joined the protest spontaneously. The march, which began at about 3:00 p.m., continued to about 9:00 p.m. The last time that Hong Kong witnessed such a massive protest was 14 years ago after the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in China in 1989.

Most protesters echoed the same message: the Hong Kong government does not listen to the people; they are afraid that the government's actions will endanger Hong Kong's freedoms for future generations. The reaction of some officials to the protest though displayed a sheer incapacity to comprehend the sentiments and consensus among Hong Kong's people. The secretary for security's comment prior to the march, for example, that those joining the protest would do so as a holiday activity for fun demonstrates her lack of touch with reality.

AHRC is concerned that the authorities will continue to ignore the views of the people of Hong Kong and will not respond to their sensible requests. While the

government states that one of its overriding concerns is to maintain the stability of Hong Kong, its insensitivity to the voice of the people, in fact, creates the very instability that it claims it wants to avoid. Now is *the* time for the Hong Kong government to take Hong Kong's people seriously and not ignore them.

Hong Kong is a peaceful but vibrant and mature society. Yesterday more than half a million people who took to the streets protested in a civilised and peaceful manner. It is not a society that can be misled by politically active people in the community as a pro-Beijing legislator in Hong Kong asserted. It is the time for all people, including pro-Beijing legislators, to face reality.

Hong Kong people's strong and visible response to the proposed national security laws has significance far beyond Hong Kong and China. Yesterday's protest conveys a strong message to other Asian States that have enacted and used national security laws to curtail the freedoms and human rights of their people, like Singapore, Malaysia, India and south Korea. Yesterday Hong Kong's people voted with their feet that they do not want the law to be used to oppress them and deny them their freedoms as happens in so many other parts of Asia. It is time to get rid of national security laws once and for all, not only in Hong Kong, but in all Asian countries which have such laws. What Hong Kong's people need is not legislation to limit their freedoms. What is more urgent for Hong Kong's people are jobs, fair wages, economic security and, most of all, the ability to fully elect their government and legislature through universal suffrage.

By coming on to the streets, the people of Hong Kong have shown the world their sentiments. Today's action by Hong Kong's people confirms their dissatisfaction with the Hong Kong government's attempts to dilute or deny their basic freedoms and endanger the rule of law.

Now is *the* time for the Hong Kong government to take action to genuinely respond to the views of Hong Kong's people and not engage in superficial damage control. Now is *the* time for the government to stop pointing fingers at others and seriously look at itself. Now is *the* time for the government to make its "accountability system" accountable. If the government continues to ignore such a powerful message by the public, Hong Kong may become destabilised because of the government's actions. In this light, AHRC renews its call to the Hong Kong government to scrap the proposed national security laws. The government needs to respond positively and sensibly NOW!

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