

September 25, 2023

Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street London SW1A 2AA
United Kingdom

Via PM Office email form <https://contact.no10.gov.uk/>

and via email rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned press freedom and human rights groups, urge your immediate attention on the plight of Jimmy Lai, the founder of the now-shuttered pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily and a British citizen, who will have been unjustly held behind bars for 1,000 days in Hong Kong on September 26, 2023. We believe it is your government's responsibility to stand up for its citizens and hereby implore you to take decisive action in securing Lai's release as a fundamental step to safeguard press freedom in Hong Kong.

As you are aware, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly recently concluded his visit to China, providing an opportune moment for the U.K. government to utilize re-established lines of communication. We strongly urge you to follow up on Cleverly's discussions and engage with your Chinese counterpart regarding the ongoing imprisonment of Lai.

Since December 2020, Lai has been subjected to unjust convictions and harsh sentences, including unwarranted charges of inciting and participating in unauthorized assemblies, as well as fraud, which can keep him incarcerated for more than seven years in total. Additionally, Lai, who is 75, is still awaiting trial on three counts of collusion under Hong Kong's national security law, one sedition charge, and one charge of perverting the course of justice. Conviction on these charges could result in a life sentence for Lai.

In summary, Lai's crime consists of owning and directing a news organization that was reporting on the concerns and struggles of a pro-democracy movement that has been virtually silenced by the state.

We echo the "grave concern" raised by [United Nations experts](#), including the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and a group of four U.N. special rapporteurs, regarding the

imprisonment and prosecutions of Lai in a formal communication sent to the Chinese government in March 2023, and their call on Chinese authorities to take all necessary interim measures “to halt the alleged violations of (Lai’s fundamental rights).”

We acknowledge the foreign secretary raised the issue of Lai during his visit to Beijing. However, given the urgency of the situation and the vulnerability of Lai’s health at his advanced age, we implore you to take further action. We believe that your government is best placed to demand his immediate release and strongly urge you to do so.

It is time to confront Beijing on how it has fallen short of honoring the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, in which Hong Kong’s autonomy was guaranteed under the “one country, two systems” agreement. Hong Kong authorities must also be held accountable for failing to respect fundamental rights, and the freedom of speech and of the press enshrined in the city’s Basic Law.

We urge you to use all available public and private channels to state unequivocally that the U.K. government wants Lai released, both bilaterally and in relevant multilateral fora, including the U.N. General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

We call on you not only to support Lai, who is a U.K. national, but also the people of Hong Kong, by taking additional measures and making a public statement calling on the Hong Kong government to release all journalists wrongly detained for their work and for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

We implore you to use your office to protect and preserve a free press in the former British colony. We are confident that your swift and resolute action will make a significant impact on the pursuit of justice and the preservation of media freedom in Hong Kong.

Signed:

Amnesty International UK

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation

Committee to Protect Journalists

English PEN

Freedom House

Hong Kong Media Overseas

International Federation of Journalists

International Service for Human Rights

PEN International

Reporters Without Borders UK