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Hong Kong court finds journalists guilty of sedition

If any lingering doubt still exists about the Hong Kong government's determination to criminalize independent journalism it was dispelled today by the conviction of journalists from the now shuttered news portal Stand News whose editors have been found guilty of sedition.

Chung Pui-kuen, the portals' former editor-in chief and Patrick Lam, the former acting editor-in-chief, have yet to be sentenced following a much delayed trial. They face up to two years in jail under a colonial-era law they were charged. Sedition offences are now part of a new security law enacted in March, which carries a maximum 10-year prison term.

In the judgement the journalists were said to have committed sedition by publishing interviews and opinion pieces by government opponents. Going further Judge WK Kwok invented a new term to describe the alleged political 'bias' of Stand News which he said was guilty of upholding a "localist" ideology and promoting the notion of "localist autonomy" for Hong Kong.

The openly political nature of the verdict severely undermines claims that the Hong Kong judiciary is even pretending to uphold the law without fear or favour.

The reality is that the defendants have been convicted for doing no more than carrying out normal journalistic work which had been legal in Hong Kong.

Stand News, closed after a massive police raid in 2021, is one of six news organisations that have also been compelled to cease operation

Reporters Without Borders estimates that 23 journalists and press freedom defenders have been arrested since 2021, 10 of them remain in detention.

Hong Kong, was once ranked as having one of the freest media environments in Asia, but in the organization's annual survey of global press freedom, released in May 2024, Hong Kong ranked only 135th out of 180 countries and regions in the world, down among some of the world's most notorious free speech abusers.

We now await with trepidation the outcome of trials targeting senior staff from the defunct Apple Daily newspaper, especially its founder Jimmy Lai who faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life behind bars.

Joseph Ngan, the chairman of Hong Kong Media Overseas, said: 'Business as usual can no longer be tolerated with the Chinese regime that has ruthlessly reneged on guarantees given to Hong Kong which is supposed to enjoy the liberties that existed before the handover to Beijing in 1997, not least the right to freedom of expression.'

'We hope that the rest of the world can see how the legal system can be weaponized against journalists and the chilling effect it has on freedom of expression.'

Please contact info@hkmo.org.uk for media enquiries in either English or Chinese

This statement is supported by the following organisations:

Hong Kong Media Overseas

The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong

Committee to Protect Journalists

Index on Censorship

International Federation of Journalists