

Testimony on 26 September Senate Hearing

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Opening

This day five years ago, September 26, 2014, marked the beginning of the Umbrella Movement, which saw hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers occupying major thoroughways for three months in pursuit of democracy. It was our response to Chinese leaders who broke their promise of universal suffrage that they made with both the British government and the Hong Kong people almost four decades ago. The movement then escalated as the police responded by firing 87 canisters of tear gas against peaceful protesters, including myself.

The movement was ultimately unsuccessful in realizing our dreams of a democratic society. As a student leader, I would subsequently even be imprisoned for my role. But I distinctly remember that on the last day of our occupation, fellow protesters hung a large banner proclaiming “We Will Be Back” on Harcourt Road, just outside the government headquarters. Five years later, during this past summer of discontent, we have made good on that promise.

Purpose of the Movement

Public anger in Hong Kong exploded in early June this year against a proposed extradition law that would have allowed criminal suspects Hong Kong to face trial in China, where the legal system is designed to serve the interests of the ruling Communist Party. But with more than two million people marching in the streets, we exerted an unprecedented amount of pressure to the government and forced Chief Executive Carrie Lam to first suspend the bill in mid-June, before fully withdrawing it early this month.

But our struggle has moved far beyond that. Our prosperity and dignity as a society are built on the success of the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and freedoms. Hong Kongers clearly understand that these values are extremely fragile and are being eroded by Beijing. Our autonomy is the cornerstone of the “One Country, Two Systems” constitutional framework, and that is now seriously threatened.

Police Violence

Instead of alleviating the tension, the Hong Kong government has been hiding behind the police force. To make matters worse, thugs with ties to organized crime have also been involved with inciting violence against not just protesters but random passersby just as the police look away. My friends Joshua Wong and Denise Ho have already explained in greater detail these well-

documented instances last week in a different hearing held by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, chaired by Congressman Jim McGovern.

What I do wish to stress is that the apparent collusion between the Hong Kong police force and pro-Beijing gangsters, facilitated by the state apparatus, have ignited public anger. These actions constitute a gross violation of internationally-recognized human rights.

The police have shot protestors in the head, resulting in at least three cases of permanent eye damage. First aiders have been blocked when they tried to apply treatment on injuries; some have even been arrested. Once detained, protestors have had to face torture in police stations, where access to lawyers is increasingly difficult. The *New York Times* recently highlighted one story: a protester's shoulder joint was fractured into four pieces and detached from the bone below; many others suffered concussions. They were then transferred to the notorious San Uk Ling Holding Centre close to the Hong Kong-China border, where, according to a report by Amnesty International, another round of torture took place, far removed from the cameras.

There is a prevalent but dangerous mentality among the police: They dehumanize protestors and frame them as "cockroaches" and "objects." This intensifies their brutality by reducing their sympathy, which was the same tactics applied during the Rwandan genocide. The level of destruction, obviously, is incomparable, but at the core of this is what to do with monopolized violence.

Goals and Action Items

Even though the police brutality is astonishing, and the government must be held accountable for this misbehavior, the crux of the problem is the overreach of the Chinese Communist Party. The international community should join hands with us and urge Beijing to honor the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, which governs the transfer of sovereignty and the application of "One Country, Two Systems" in Hong Kong. China in recent years has repeatedly declared the treaty "invalid" as an excuse to omit its obligations, but that is only because they do not wish to be held accountable for what is now happening.

Earlier this week, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, President Donald Trump proclaimed: "The world fully expects that the Chinese government will honor its binding treaty made with the British and registered with the United Nations in which China commits to protecting Hong Kong's freedom, legal system, and democratic ways of life. How China chooses to handle this situation will say a great deal about its role in the world in the future."

I welcome this as a sign that the administration is aware of the Chinese government's record of breaking promises just as a new round of trade talks have resumed. But concrete actions are vital. Yesterday, both the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act unanimously. This

piece of legislation will now move ahead for consideration on both the House and Senate floors. I am therefore speaking today to seek every Senator's support. Hong Kongers cannot stand alone in this great battle against the largest authoritarian power in the 21st century.

As we approach October 1, which marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, I hope to remind Beijing that its crackdown on the freedoms of its own people, not its heavily-orchestrated celebrations, will be watched around the world.