Hong Kong protests: Joshua Wong and other pro-democracy figures arrested

August 30, 2019

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The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/30/hong-kong-pro-democracy-leader-joshua-wong-arrested-says-demosisto>

Several prominent pro-democracy figures have been arrested in Hong Kong in an apparent crackdown on [protests that have plunged the city into its worst political crisis](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/hong-kong-protests-dozens-arrested-as-government-warns-of-very-dangerous-situation) in decades.

The democracy activists Joshua Wong and Agnes Chow, former student leaders of pro-democracy protests in 2014, were arrested on Friday and Andy Chan, the head of a now banned pro-independence party, was detained by police on Thursday. Wong and Chow were charged with offences including taking part in an unlawful assembly on 21 June 21 at [Hong Kong](https://www.theguardian.com/world/hong-kong) police headquarters and released.

“All we ask for is just to urge Beijing and the Hong Kong government withdraw the [extradition] bill, stop police brutality and respond to our calls for free elections,” Wong said following his release.

“Even though I’ve been jailed three times and I face trial on 8 November – which is three months [away] – we will not stop our fight. We shall never surrender. I urge the international community to send a clear message to President Xi: sending troops or using an emergency ordinance is not the way out. We will continue our fight no matter how they arrest or prosecute us.”

A rally planned for Saturday has now been called off out of concern that police will arrest participants en masse. On an online forum, some have called for demonstrators to come out anyway. Many expect the arrests will only generate more public anger and clashes with police.

“This won’t scare us. Adding to public anger only pushes more people to rebel,” one user commented on a protest forum.

Another wrote: “Even if they bring the tanks out, I will still be there.”

On Friday morning, Wong was bundled into a van on the street while he was walking to a metro station, according to Wong and Chow’s political organisation, Demosistō. Chow was arrested at home, while Chan, in a separate incident, was detained at Hong Kong airport.

The pair were arrested on suspicion of participating and inciting others to participate in an unauthorised assembly during protests outside police headquarters on 21 June. Wong has also been accused of organising an unlawful assembly.

Others reportedly arrested include the former student leader Althea Suen, Shatin district councillor Rick Hui Yiu-yu and New Territories West legislator Cheng Chung-tai. Demosisto’s chairman Ivan Lam was charged in absentia and reportedly could not be arrested because he is in Taiwan.

As mass protests continue in Hong Kong, now entering what would be its 13th straight weekend of demonstrations, authorities have worked to put down the protests. In recent weeks, police have banned rallies that were previously permitted and have increased arrests.

Police had banned Saturday’s demonstration, organised by the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), which has held several peaceful major marches. Earlier this month the group went ahead with a banned march but on Friday, after news of the three activists’ arrests, it called off Saturday’s event.

“Our first principle is always to protect all the participants and make sure that no one bears legal consequences because of participating in the protest that we organised,” said the CHRF vice-convener Bonnie Leung.

More than 800 people have been arrested since protests began in early June against a legislative bill that would have allowed suspects in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland [China](https://www.theguardian.com/world/china). Hong Kong’s chief executive, Carrie Lam, has said the bill is “dead” but protesters continue to demand it be permanently withdrawn.

According to a report by Reuters, Beijing has ordered Lam not to accede to any of the protesters’ demands, which also include launching an independent investigation into police behaviour and implementing direct elections.

“This is something the government can do – massive arrests to dry up and sap the strength of the protest movement,” said Joseph Cheng, a retired political scientist who has been following the protests closely.

“It’s a campaign, probably a well-planned campaign, to arrest all the activists and this will involve a lot of less famous people who have been standing in the frontlines of the protests,” he said.

Saturday’s rally was meant to mark five years since Beijing’s proposal for direct elections in Hong Kong, which would only allow candidates screened by Beijing. The proposal sparked mass protests known as the umbrella movement, of which Wong and Chow were major leaders.

Neither has played a central role in the current protests, a largely leaderless movement organised via social media.

Wong has attended the protests and spoken out frequently in support of the demonstrators’ demands. Chow has also attended recent demonstrations and maintains an active social media account in support of the protests, but has otherwise kept a relatively low profile.

All three activists belong to political organisations that advocate for independence or “self-determination”. Chow was disqualified from running for legislative elections last year on the basis of Demosistō’s support of self-determination, which authorities have interpreted as support for independence.

Chan’s Hong Kong National party was banned last year on grounds of national security, the first political group to be outlawed in decades.

The protests, which have evolved into a broader political movement [demanding universal suffrage in addition to the withdrawal of the bill](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/13/what-do-the-hong-kong-protesters-want), pose the most serious challenge to Beijing’s authority over the city since the former British colony returned to Chinese control in 1997.

On Thursday the convener of the CHRF, Jimmy Sham, was attacked inside a restaurant by two masked men wielding baseball bats and knives. Another protester, Max Chung, who organised a march in Yuen Long last month, was attacked by four men wielding rods.

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Observers say the crackdown has affected not only protesters but regular citizens and staff at the Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific, who have been encouraged to inform on their colleagues. Before a class boycott by protesting students next week, teachers have also come under fire from pro-government figures.

“This is exactly what white terror means to ordinary people,” said Cheng. “The administration is using all kinds of suppression to create a deterrent effect.”

Under the terms of the handover, Hong Kong was promised 50 years of a “high degree” of autonomy, in a framework known as “one country, two systems” in which the city would keep an independent judiciary, legislature, a free press and other freedoms. Protesters say the extradition bill represents the end of Hong Kong’s freedom under Beijing’s tightening control over the city.