

## **Nathan Kwung Chung Law's Article on the situation in Hong Kong**

Prior to the student strike two years ago, the organization we once represented, the Hong Kong Federation of Students, spent over two years organizing deliberation days, referendums with the participation of over 13,000 students, and assemblies regarding Hong Kong's future. We repeatedly invited HKSAR government officials to have a discussion with us on the political reform proposals, but the government refused to meet with us. Working within the system, we have tried every single lawful means to initiate a meaningful dialogue. The HKSAR government refused to listen. Finally the National People's Congress Standing Committee decided that only candidates approved by the Communist party could run for Hong Kong Chief Executive.

Ultimately we had no choice but to organize a class boycott, hoping that this would lead to a dialogue with the Chief Executive where our views could be well presented. Again, sadly we were rejected. Since the HKSAR government refused to even acknowledge our basic human right of free expression, we had no choice but to use peaceful civil disobedience to make our voices heard. Civil disobedience is the last resort for Hong Kong people. It was the only way to make the oppression visible to the world, and to mobilize the people of Hong Kong to protect their human rights, including their democratic rights.

We took this decision very seriously. We knew we would be sacrificing study time and going without rest. But it became much worse than that. Two days after the action began, the police attacked us with 87 cans of tear gas, beat the students with batons, and showed a banner stating, "Disperse or we will fire." They were carrying Remington Gauge 87 and Colt AR-15 weapons, which could kill. Try to imagine, if the police had fired, would the foreign investors stay in Hong Kong? No, they will leave immediately. If this is the HKSAR government's response to protestors who are only asking for the rights that they have been promised in the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, what will the future be for Hong Kong?

We are afraid that young people in Hong Kong face the future with increased feelings of hopelessness. Compared to other developed regions worldwide, Hong Kong has the highest wealth gap, and the property is the most unaffordable. Upward social mobility for young people is very low. Since 1997, Hong Kong has gone through a continuous process of "Mainlandization" where freedom of press, expression and association, rule of law and human rights have drastically deteriorated. Beijing's interference with Hong Kong domestic affairs is deep and wide. In the education sector, they even tried to brain-wash the public and secondary school children with their so called patriotic national education where the Chinese Communist party has been described as a "progressive, selfless and united ruling party". Without genuine universal suffrage in the election of Chief Executive and Legislative Councillors, the HKSAR Government has not shown any accountability to the Hong Kong citizens, especially young people. They younger generation feel that they don't matter in the society. When you peacefully ask for your rights, you are hit with tear gas and batons. Eventually the police violence aggravates and prolongs the protests.

In other words, unless there is genuine universal suffrage in political system in Hong Kong, this is a recipe for disaster, not for a world-class city or a stable financial centre. There is only one way to make the younger generation feel hopeful, which is to entrench Hong Kong with genuine democracy and balance of power so that the younger generation can take ownership of their own future. Subsequently the society will be stabilized and the conflicts in society between the citizens and the government be reduced. If Hong Kong could establish a democratic system, it would help the second largest economy to comply with international code of democracy, freedom, rule of law thus benefiting the world's economy and development. Furthermore, if China can breach an international agreement such as the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which Canada and many other countries endorsed, what international treaty will it choose to violate next?

We know that if you were in our position, if you didn't have the right to freely nominate candidates to represent you in an election, you would do the same. Hong Kong is facing a dilemma, the whole world is watching us, whether human rights will eventually be deprived. We must uphold the core values of democracy, human rights and justice.