

PRESS RELEASE

*** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Thursday, 28th November 2024 ***

European Parliament calls for Jimmy Lai’s immediate and unconditional release

Today, Thursday 28th November 2024, the European Parliament has passed by an overwhelming majority an urgent Resolution calling for Jimmy Lai’s immediate and unconditional release.

The Resolution on ‘[Hong Kong, notably the cases of Jimmy Lai and the 45 activists recently convicted under the application of national security law](#)’ is the first time the newly constituted European Parliament (since the June 2024 elections) has considered Mr Lai’s case and the situation in Hong Kong. This is one of the most urgent global issues which the Parliament considered during its Plenary this week.

The Resolution, having noted Mr Lai’s detention on “*trumped-up charges*” since 2020, on which he now faces life imprisonment, stresses the difficult prison conditions endured by political prisoners in Hong Kong, noting Mr Lai’s age, his diabetes and the denial of Holy Communion, and urges the Hong Kong authorities “*to immediately and unconditionally release all pro-democracy activists, including Lai ..., and to drop all charges against them*”.

The Resolution follows the publication by the United Nations (“UN”) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on [15th November 2024](#), of its Opinion on Mr Lai’s case, in which it found multiple violations of Mr Lai’s rights and fundamental freedoms and determined that Mr Lai is unlawfully and arbitrarily detained, and called for his immediate release.

The Resolution passed by an overwhelming majority of 473 in favour, 23 against, with 98 absentions.

Speaking today, following the vote, Jimmy Lai’s son, **Sebastien Lai**, said:

“Today the European Parliament has condemned the deterioration in fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Hong Kong since the introduction of the National Security Law, and MEPs have called for my father’s immediate and unconditional release. My father is 77 years of age and has already spent four years in a maximum security prison, in solitary confinement. This is cruel and unjustified, as today’s Resolution makes clear. This is a strong statement from the new Parliament about the importance of releasing my father to EU/ China relations. I call upon the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities to take heed, release my father and allow him to return home to enjoy his final years in London with our family.”

International counsel for Mr Lai and Sebastien Lai, **Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC**, added:

“The European Union’s aims, enshrined in Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty, include upholding and promoting its values and interests in its relations with the wider world, and ensuring strict observance of international law and the protection of human rights. The Hong Kong authorities’ treatment of Jimmy Lai over the past four years flies in the face of these European values. He has been arbitrarily detained; he has faced a barrage of lawsuits which target him for exercising his rights protected under international law; his newspaper has been shut down; and he has endured unacceptable prison conditions.

We thank all MEPs who used their voices today to call for this horrendous situation to end, and for Mr Lai to be immediately and unconditionally released. Now the European Council, EEAS and EU Member States must follow Parliament’s lead and take robust action to secure Mr Lai’s liberty – and save his life.”

During the debate, that took place on Wednesday 27th November, speakers from all the main European Parliament Political Groups and European Union (“EU”) Commissioner Helena Dalli condemned Mr Lai’s trial, the deterioration of human rights and the rule of law in Hong Kong, called upon the EU to stand in solidarity with Mr Lai and the ‘Hong Kong 45’, recently sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment for pro-democracy activities, and called for Mr Lai’s release.

- **Miriam Lexmann MEP** (EPP) said: *“Jimmy Lai and the Hong Kong 45 represent the best of [Hong Kong]; its spirit and its love of freedom and democracy...It is a moral obligation and a security necessity to stand with Hong Kong.”*
- **Chloe Ridel MEP** (S&D) described the situation in Hong Kong as “disastrous”, and called on the EU to *“stand firm and stand by the side of those in favour of freedom of expression, democracy and freedom of assembly.”*
- Commenting on Mr Lai’s trial, **Marius Kaminski MEP** (ECR), said *“Jimmy Lai’s trial is a complete farce...When engaging with China we need to say that human rights are non-negotiable.”*
- Reflecting on the repression and crackdown in Hong Kong, **Hermann Tertsch MEP** stressed *“you cannot have normal relations with a country who tramples on human rights.”*
- **Petras Austrevicius MEP** (Renew), urged the Parliament to *“continue to call for the unconditional release of Jimmy Lai.”*

Commenting on Mr Lai’s case and the actions taken by the EU, EU Commissioner, **Helena Dalli**, said:

“The trial of Jimmy Lai and the sentencing of the Hong Kong 45 is emblematic of the erosion of democracy and freedom in Hong Kong; both cases undermine the rule of law in Hong Kong which is a cornerstone of the attraction of Hong Kong as an international business hub...Jimmy Lai is being prosecuted for his support of freedom of expression and democracy in Hong Kong...The EU has closely followed the trial

including by regularly attending the court hearings and issuing statements and raising concerns in meetings with the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities.”

The international legal team for Jimmy Lai and Sebastien Lai is led by [Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC](#), and including [Jonathan Price](#), [Tatyana Eatwell](#), [Jennifer Robinson](#) and [Associate Martha Spurrier](#), all of Doughty Street Chambers, London.

Further Background:

Jimmy Lai is a 77-year-old British citizen and renowned pro-democracy campaigner, media entrepreneur, writer, and [prisoner of conscience](#). He is currently imprisoned in Hong Kong and has been detained there, in solitary confinement, since December 2020. He was initially held on remand in pre-trial detention and was then convicted and sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment for participation in peaceful pro-democracy assemblies and a vigil marking the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre of 1989. He is currently serving a sentence of imprisonment in relation to a spurious fraud conviction said to arise out of the breach of a commercial lease which has been widely condemned as an abuse of the law to silence dissent and freedom of speech. For example, the United States [condemned the conviction](#) and described the sentence as a “*grossly unjust outcome*” which “[b]y any objective measure... is neither fair nor just”, a view supported by the UN Working Group’s findings in its Opinion concerning Mr Lai’s case, published on 15th November 2024.

Mr Lai is currently standing trial for alleged sedition and alleged conspiracy to collude with foreign agents under the controversial NSL (the “**NSL trial**”). On the Prosecution’s own case, Mr Lai is being accused of practising journalism, speaking to politicians about politics, and raising concerns about accountability for human rights violations in Hong Kong. If convicted, Mr Lai faces life imprisonment.

Mr Lai’s NSL trial has been the subject of significant delays. After repeated delay his trial eventually began on 18th December 2023. On the eve of his trial, 17th December 2023, the then United Kingdom (“**UK**”) Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, [called](#) on the Hong Kong authorities to end its politically motivated prosecution of Mr Lai and to release him. His trial, originally slated to last for 80 days, is still ongoing. The prosecution closed its case on 11th June 2024. The trial was adjourned for six weeks until 24th July for legal submissions by the defence that there was no case to answer. The court rejected that submission on 25th July 2024 and adjourned the case for a further 4 months to 20th November 2024, when the Defence opened its case, and Mr Lai took to the witness stand.

Earlier, on 22nd January 2024, five Special Rapporteurs released a [statement](#) calling for Mr Lai’s immediate and unconditional release.

On 31st January 2024 the UN [announced](#) that the Special Rapporteur on torture had written to the authorities in China to address claims that the evidence of a key prosecution witness in Mr Lai’s trial had been obtained through torture, and calling for an immediate investigation into the allegations.

On 16th October 2024 the UK Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, [confirmed](#) to Parliament that Mr Lai’s case is a priority for the UK Government and called on the Hong Kong authorities to immediately release Mr Lai, and raised concerns regarding Mr Lai’s deteriorating health with President Xi during their bilateral meeting on the fringes of the G20 Summit in Brazil, on 17th November 2024. On 23rd October 2024, in response to questions in Parliament concerning the

Foreign Secretary's recent visit to China, the Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, confirmed that he had reiterated the Government's call for Mr Lai's immediate release in meetings with his counterpart in Beijing.

ENDS

Notes:

1. Earlier Resolutions of the European Parliament, in its previous constitution, on the situation in Hong Kong and the case of Jimmy Lai include:
 - European Parliament Resolution of 15 June 2023 on the deterioration of fundamental rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, notably the case of Jimmy Lai ([2023/2737 \(RSP\)](#)).
 - European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2021 on Hong Kong, notably the case of Apple Daily, P9 TA ([2021/2786\(RSP\)](#)).
2. Background information on Mr Lai's case is available at www.supportjimmylai.com or on social media using the hashtag #FreeJimmyLai.
3. For press enquiries please contact LaiPress@doughtystreet.co.uk