

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Geneva: media freedom experts call on the international community to take action to secure Jimmy Lai's release from prison

Geneva, 7th September 2022 – The international legal team acting for renowned media entrepreneur, pro-democracy campaigner, and writer Jimmy Lai has addressed diplomats, journalists and the international community at an event at the Press Club in Geneva, ahead of the upcoming 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council which starts on Monday 12th September 2022. Speaking yesterday afternoon, the leader of the international legal team, Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, called on States to take “*concrete, robust steps*” to protect Mr Lai and secure his release from prison, and to hold the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities to account for undermining human rights protections, freedom of expression and the rule of law.

Ms Gallagher QC was speaking alongside renowned journalists and media freedom experts who expressed support for and solidarity with Mr Lai: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate **Maria Ressa**, President of the Committee to Protect Journalists, **Jodie Ginsberg**, and distinguished journalist **John Simpson CBE**, who chaired the event. Mr Lai's son, **Sebastien Lai**, spoke about his father's ordeal, joining the event online from Taiwan.

Opening the event, **John Simpson CBE**, Foreign Correspondent and BBC News World Affairs Editor, described Jimmy Lai as “*an important media figure in Hong Kong*” and said,

“Jimmy wanted to stand up and be counted, for the right to speak out in Hong Kong... and now Jimmy faces the possibility at least of life imprisonment – and for a 74 year old man, that is a serious consideration.”

Mr Simpson called for support for Mr Lai, saying, “*given the circumstances that he's in, it's important to stand up and be counted for him.*”

Sebastien Lai, Jimmy Lai's son, said:

“The Hong Kong authorities have pursued, and continue to pursue, a litany of criminal charges against my father. They have clamped down on press freedoms in Hong Kong. Just last week a judge ruled against my father to allow the police to search phones used for journalism. Journalists have been arrested on trumped-up charges of sedition and endangering national security for doing their jobs: speaking truth to power.

We have waited almost two years for national security and sedition trials that threaten to keep my father behind bars for the rest of his life. The persecution of my father and his colleagues is a warning to every single journalist, every single activist, and every single person who dares to speak the truth. We call on the international community, its diplomats, fellow journalists and everyone who treasures press freedom to do everything in their power to secure his freedom.”

Maria Ressa, journalist and co-founder of news website Rappler.com and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, described Jimmy Lai as being, “*at the forefront of this battle for free expression, the battle for journalists to continue doing our jobs.*” She said that,

“first, the only defence for a journalist under attack is to shine the light... I don’t think we’ve done this enough in Jimmy’s case. Second, silence is complicity. And third, we’ve got to hold the line.”

Jodie Ginsberg, President of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), said

“Jimmy Lai is a tireless advocate for press freedom and democracy, and his imprisonment is a travesty. In 2021, China was the world’s worst jailer of journalists, with 50 behind bars, including 8 in Hong Kong. The mainland’s silencing of critical voices must stop.”

Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, international counsel for Mr Lai, said:

“Jimmy Lai’s case is deeply concerning in itself: he faces a barrage of spurious legal cases and risks life behind bars, all due to his work as a writer, media owner and peaceful pro-democracy campaigner. His case is also emblematic of wider concerns in Hong Kong: the use of the draconian National Security Law to silence critical voices, the weaponization of a range of other laws to target journalists and peaceful protestors, and the dismantling of the rule of law. Urgent action by the United Nations and the international community to hold the authorities to account is now essential. Quiet, backroom diplomacy has not worked in this case to date. There is nothing to indicate that it will succeed in the weeks and months ahead. Concrete, robust action is needed.”

She added,

“A particular plea to the UK. We emphasise that Mr Lai is a UK national. He is a UK national imprisoned for his principles. His prosecution and imprisonment flagrantly violates international law and international standards, and has attracted widespread condemnation. Today, there is a new Prime Minister in the UK, Liz Truss MP, and a new Foreign Secretary. It is imperative that the UK now speaks out in support of its citizen.”

Mr Lai is represented by an international legal team, led by Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, and including Jonathan Price and Jennifer Robinson.

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Notes to Editors

1. Jimmy Lai is a high-profile supporter of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement and has been an outspoken critic of Beijing’s control over Hong Kong for many years. He is a well-known advocate of peaceful assembly. He is the founder of *Apple Daily*, one of Hong Kong’s most popular Chinese language newspapers until it closed in June 2021.
2. Mr Lai, now aged 74, was arrested in August 2020 and has been imprisoned since. He is currently on remand, having already served concurrent prison sentences which arise from his attendance and participation in various protests in Hong Kong between 2019-20, including a 13-month

sentence for attending a June 2020 vigil marking the 1989 Tiananmen massacre in Beijing, at which he lit a candle to show his respect to the victims.

3. Other pending charges against Mr Lai include allegations of collusion with foreign forces and seditious publication under the controversial National Security Law (NSL) in relation to various articles published by *Apple Daily*, including editorials critical of the Chinese and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) authorities, critical of the prosecution and targeting of protesters and reports on the protests. His NSL trial is due to commence in December 2022.
4. Mr Lai's international legal team have two urgent appeals pending before the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council. In April 2022, they [filed an urgent appeal](#) with several UN Special Rapporteurs concerning the legal harassment against him as a result of him exercising his internationally protected rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the right to peaceful protest. In July 2022, they [filed a second urgent appeal](#) with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, submitting that his continued imprisonment was unlawful.
5. The 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council will take place in Geneva, starting on 12th September 2022. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is due to report to the Council on 19th September 2022.
6. Mr Lai's case was discussed at an event held at the Geneva Press Club on Tuesday 6th September 2022, entitled, 'Democracy and Free Speech in Hong Kong: The Case of Jimmy Lai and Apple Daily.' A recording of the event is available [here](#).