

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Jimmy Lai's international legal team calls on United Nations expert group to take action to end his arbitrary detention in a Hong Kong prison

The international legal team representing renowned media entrepreneur, pro-democracy campaigner, and writer, Jimmy Lai, has today, Thursday 7th July 2022, filed an urgent appeal with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (the UN Working Group), submitting that Mr Lai's continuing imprisonment is unlawful.

Mr Lai, now aged 74, 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 was forced to close in June 2021. In the days ahead of the closure, Hong Kong authorities arrested five *Apple Daily* senior executives and froze the company's assets, as well as Mr Lai's assets, leaving the newspaper with no choice but to close.

Mr Lai has been repeatedly targeted by the Hong Kong authorities because of his political opinions and his status as a high-profile pro-democracy advocate. The targeting of Mr Lai has intensified since the passing of the controversial National Security Law (NSL) in 2020. He was arrested in August 2020 and he remains in prison in Hong Kong.

Today's appeal requests urgent action by the UN Working Group, in order to secure the release of Mr Lai. The appeal submits that Mr Lai's detention is in breach of international law because:

- (i) The actions taken by the Hong Kong authorities that have resulted in Mr Lai's detention are arbitrary and contrary to international law. They constitute unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on his exercise of his internationally protected rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- (ii) Mr Lai has been targeted because of his legitimate exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly. This ongoing prosecutorial and judicial harassment of Mr Lai is of such gravity as to render arbitrary the deprivation of liberty in his case, both pre-trial and post-conviction; and

- (iii) Mr Lai has been prosecuted and convicted and is being prosecuted in circumstances where there is a real and serious concern about the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law in Hong Kong, in light of the NSL under which Mr Lai faces prosecution.

Sebastien Lai, Mr Lai's son, said:

“My dad’s only ‘crime’ is to campaign for democracy in the face of tyranny, but for that he has already spent almost two years in prison and faces the rest of his life behind bars. My dad is one of many Hong Kongers targeted in the HKSAR government’s and CCP’s crackdown on civil society and independent media.

I ask the United Nations and the UK Government to speak out for my dad, and stand up to those who seek to silence him.”

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

“Jimmy Lai is arbitrarily detained in a Hong Kong prison, faces a barrage of spurious cases and the risk of spending the rest of his life behind bars, all due to his work as a writer, media owner and peaceful pro-democracy campaigner. Vital rights and freedoms – to free speech, a free media, the right to protest – are vanishing fast in Hong Kong. Urgent action by the United Nations and the international community to hold the authorities to account is now essential.”

She added, addressing the UK Government:

“Jimmy Lai is a British citizen, imprisoned in Hong Kong despite widespread international condemnation. We call on the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to take immediate, robust action to secure his release.”

**** ENDS ****

Notes to editors:

1. Jimmy Lai is represented at an international level by an international legal team of barristers, led by Ms Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC and including Mr Jonathan Price and Ms Jennifer Robinson. Any queries regarding this matter should be directed to Jennifer Robinson at j.robinson@doughtystreet.co.uk.
2. Today’s appeal has been filed with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The Working Group is composed of five independent experts and it has a mandate to investigate cases of deprivation of liberty imposed arbitrarily or inconsistently with international legal standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
3. The international legal team has previously (on the 8th April 2022) filed a separate appeal with a number of United Nations Special Rapporteurs. Details of that appeal are available [here](#).

