

PRESS RELEASE

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UN Special Rapporteur raises concerns about Jimmy Lai's case at the UN Human Rights Council

On Tuesday 11th and Wednesday 12th March the UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-terrorism and Human Rights, Professor Ben Saul, addressed the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva and reiterated his concerns about China's national security laws and the prosecution of Jimmy Lai.

The Special Rapporteur's remarks come in the context of yet more unexplained delays in Jimmy Lai's trial in Hong Kong under the controversial National Security Law (NSL), further prolonging his arbitrary detention.

In response to [UN complaints filed by Mr Lai's international legal team](#), UN experts – including Professor Saul – have [called for his release](#) on the grounds his prosecution is “*directly related to his criticism of the Chinese Government and his support for democracy in Hong Kong SAR.*” More recently, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published its Opinion that Mr Lai is arbitrarily detained, and called for his immediate and unconditional release. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has also called for Mr Lai's release.

The Special Rapporteur, Professor Saul, warned of the threat to human rights of over-broad national security laws, noting that Mr Lai's case had been raised repeatedly, and reiterating his [previous concerns](#) about the use of the National Security Law to prosecute Mr Lai and others for exercising internationally protected rights.

Tatyana Eatwell, a member of Mr Lai's international legal team, today addressed the UNHRC about Mr Lai's case, raising concern about how the prosecution of Mr Lai in Hong Kong is ‘*emblematic*’ of ‘*a disturbing global trend in the misuse and abuse of counter-terrorism and national security laws in order to suppress the exercise of freedom of expression by writers, journalists and publishers*’. She said:

When the [National Security] law was imposed in 2020, UN experts warned that the law could lead to “arbitrary interpretation and enforcement” to undermine human rights.

With the trial of journalist, publisher and pro-democracy activist, Jimmy Lai, now 77, those warnings have become an alarming reality.

Mr Lai is accused of sedition, said to arise out of his journalism. The ordinary actions of a media owner and writer are being treated as crimes. He is also being accused of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces for discussing democracy with foreign parliamentarians and raising concern about human rights abuse. These are not crimes. These are legitimate actions protected under international law.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found Mr Lai is arbitrarily detained and being denied his fundamental right to a fair trial. Targeted because of his exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, he should never have been prosecuted and should be immediately released.

Martha Spurrier, also a member of Mr Lai's international legal team, addressed the Council, stating:

The weaponization of the law, particularly the repressive use of national security and counter-terror laws, sees courageous truth-tellers silenced by imprisonment and prosecution. Most renowned among them is Jimmy Lai, the 77 year old journalist, democracy campaigner, media entrepreneur and founder of Apple

Daily, the most popular Chinese language newspaper in Hong Kong, and a voice for democracy and freedom in the region.

Armed with the widely-condemned National Security Law, the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have a stranglehold on media freedom. Apple Daily was forcibly shut down in 2021. Since then, Jimmy Lai has been arbitrarily detained in solitary confinement for over four years.

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For his public interest journalism and peaceful campaigning, Mr Lai has paid the price of his freedom. He is caught in the web of over-broad offences in the National Security Law that operate to suppress free speech and criminalise dissent. But these are not crimes; they are activities protected by international law.

Ms Spurrier highlighted Mr Lai's testimony in his ongoing trial:

Last week Mr Lai finished testifying in his National Security Law trial. From the stand he said, "the more information you have...the more you are free".

Dr Eatwell and Ms Spurrier both concluded their remarks by calling on China and Hong Kong to repeal the NSL and immediately and unconditionally release Mr Lai.

Sebastien Lai, Mr Lai's son, who leads the campaign for his father's release, said:

"I am grateful for the ongoing support from the UN and for the calls for my father's immediate release. But time is running out. My father is a political prisoner, he is 77 years old and his health is failing. This is a humanitarian issue and action must be taken now before it's too late."

Jimmy Lai and his son, Sebastien Lai, are represented by an international legal team, led by [Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC](#) and including [Jonathan Price](#), [Tatyana Eatwell](#), [Jennifer Robinson](#) and [Martha Spurrier](#).

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Working Group Opinion No.43/2024 on Jimmy Lai's case is available [here](#).
2. The Prime Minister repeated the call for Mr Lai's release in Parliament on 16th October 2024 and raised humanitarian concerns with President Xi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit on 18th November 2024. The Foreign Secretary raised the case in meetings with his counterpart in Beijing in November 2024, as did the Chancellor during her visit to Beijing in January 2025. Most recently, Mr Lai's case was raised with the Chinese Foreign Minister during his official visit to the UK in February 2025.
3. Dr Eatwell made her statement to the Council with the support of International PEN. It is available [here](#).
4. Martha Spurrier made her statement to the Council with the support of the International Federation of Journalists. It is available [here](#).