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## Hong Kong: Woman human rights defender Chow Hang-tung re-arrested ahead of political anniversaries and denied bail

On 30 June 2021, Hong Kong woman human rights defender and lawyer Chow Hang-tung was re-arrested after the police revoked her bail, under which she was released from an earlier arrest on 4 June 2021. On 2 July 2021, the West Kowloon Magistrates' Court denied her bail. The woman human rights defender's arrest came on the eve of the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hong Kong's transfer to Chinese rule and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

[Chow Hang-tung \(鄒幸彤\)](#) is a barrister and woman human rights defender in Hong Kong. She has advocated for the protection and promotion of labour rights, as well as for the rights of persecuted human rights defenders in mainland China. She is one of the current vice-chairs of the [Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China \(the Hong Kong Alliance\)](#), a grassroots advocacy group established in 1989 in Hong Kong to campaign for the release of Chinese political prisoners, democratic reforms in China, and accountability for the extrajudicial killings and other violations by the Chinese authorities during the lethal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in June 1989. As a barrister in Hong Kong, she has also provided legal assistance to peaceful activists and protesters targeted by police and judicial actions for their involvement in pro-democracy activities.

Chow Hang-tung is now facing the charge of “inciting others to knowingly participate in unauthorised assemblies” in relations to events on both 4 June and 1 July 2021. The woman human rights defender is being remanded in custody until the next court hearing, which is scheduled to take place on 30 July 2021. The court will review her bail on 9 July 2021.

The woman human rights defender and over [two dozens activists](#), including those affiliated with the Hong Kong Alliance, have already been facing prosecution for participating in the peaceful candlelight vigil on 4 June 2020 marking the 1989 massacre of civilians and protesters in Beijing. Many of these activists are also being prosecuted, with some already convicted, in relation to their peaceful role in other pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019 and 2020.

In a public post on Facebook earlier in the day on 30 June 2021, Chow Hang-tung suggested she was being surveilled and followed. Later that evening, police took the woman human rights defender into custody near her law office with the charge of “inciting others to participate in unauthorised assembly”. She was initially detained at the New Territories South Regional Police Headquarters and was later transferred to the Tsuen Wan Police Station. Chow Hang-tung was able to meet her lawyers on the morning of 1 July 2021.

On 28 June 2021, the Hong Kong police announced its [decision](#) to ban, for the second consecutive year, a planned pro-democracy assembly due to be held on 1 July, citing COVID-19-related restrictions on public gatherings. Chow Hang-tung provided legal assistance to the organisers to appeal the ban. On 29 June 2021, the body responsible for reviewing police objections to public gatherings [upheld](#) the ban.

In the early morning of 4 June 2021, police arrested Chow Hang-tung as she left her office and accused her of “publicising and promoting unauthorised assembly”. This was in connection to the banned candlelight vigil which the Hong Kong Alliance had hoped to organise later that evening in Victoria Park, which was surrounded by a heavy police presence. She was released on bail after

around 33 hours in detention. In the weeks following her release, Chinese government-owned media outlets in Hong Kong published articles attacking Chow Hang-tung for her legal aid work and advocacy.

Since the People's Republic of China resumed control of Hong Kong on 1 July 1997, pro-democracy protests have been an annual tradition to mark the anniversary in the city. The Hong Kong Alliance organised many peaceful protests on 1 July since 1997. Since 1989, the Hong Kong Alliance also organised the annual candlelight vigil on 4 June to mark the 1989 massacre of civilians and pro-democracy protesters in China, until the Hong Kong police banned it in 2020 and 2021.

Chow Hang-tung's case is the latest indicator of a rapidly shrinking civic space and expanding government campaign of politically motivated and rights-abusing [arrests and prosecution](#) of human rights defenders and pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong. This trend has accelerated since the unilateral imposition of a draconian "[national security law](#)" a year ago. According to [human rights monitors](#), as of 9 June 2021, at least 10,340 individuals have been arrested, 2,676 prosecuted, and 1,504 are on trial for protest-related offences. According to Hong Kong police [figures](#) compiled by reporters, at least 113 individuals have been arrested for alleged violations of Hong Kong's national security law, and 61 of them have been formally charged, as of 23 June 2021.

Front Line Defenders believes Chow Hang-tung's arrest is a reprisal for her peaceful and legitimate work of promoting and defending human rights in both Hong Kong and mainland China, as well as exercising of her freedoms of expression and assembly. It is further deeply concerned by what appears to be a growing pattern of denial of bail to activists and human rights defenders who are facing charges for peaceful expression or actions protected by international human rights law.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in Hong Kong to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Chow Hang-tung and drop all charges against her;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Hong Kong are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions and harassment, in line with Hong Kong's international human rights obligations and commitments, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which applies in Hong Kong;
3. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in genuine consultation with independent civil society and human rights defenders, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially the provisions related to public assembly, that have been used to target human rights defenders, with a view to align them with Hong Kong's obligations under international human rights law and standards.