

# MASSIVE PEACEFUL PROTESTS RESUME IN HONG KONG AFTER VIOLENT CLASHES

By Donnelly McClelland

Hundreds of thousands of peaceful protesters of all ages returned to the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday [18 August], in a massive show of solidarity for a movement that appeared on the verge of losing popular support. Protesters defied torrential rain, a police ban and menacing threats from the Chinese government to come back out for the 11th consecutive weekend of mass demonstrations. Organisers claimed as many as 1.7 million people joined the rally, with protesters thronging westwards from Victoria Park through the downtown areas, transforming much of the city centre into a sea of slow-moving umbrellas. A police estimate put the number of people at the rally's starting point at 128,000. CNN couldn't independently confirm either figure. **(CNN)**



## ***Back to protesting "the Hong Kong way"***

Sunday's peaceful march was a return to the initial approach of the protest movement, and followed ugly scenes at the city's airport on Tuesday [13 August], when a small group of protesters detained and beat two men they accused of being undercover police officers, and violently clashed with riot police. The protest movement, which began in June over a now-shelved extradition bill, has since expanded to include calls for greater democracy and government accountability.

Hong Kong's embattled, pro-Beijing leader, Carrie Lam, has said she will "immediately" set up a platform for dialogue with citizens and tackle complaints lodged against the police, after the weekend's return to peaceful protests that she hoped would be the start of a return to calm in the financial hub. Her offer, however, was dismissed by activists as "a trap". Jimmy Sham, convener of the Civil Human Rights Front (which organised Sunday's peaceful protest), said Ms Lam's offer was intended to deceive Hong Kong people, because she had already refused the protesters' five requests.

The five requests of the protestors encompass the following: the complete withdrawal of the now-suspended extradition bill; the setting up of an independent body to investigate police violence; a halt to the characterisation of protests as "riots"; an amnesty for those arrested; and a resumption of political reform to allow the free election of Hong Kong's leader and legislature and Ms Lam's resignation.

Ms Lam said an existing watchdog, the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC), would hire overseas experts to help carry out a "fact-finding study" to investigate the incidents in recent months, including an attack by armed thugs at the Yuen Long metro station in July, which left dozens injured. Protesters have demanded a third-party investigation into police actions and it seems unlikely that Ms Lam's promises will satisfy them, as critics say the IPCC comprises mostly pro-government figures who are unlikely to be critical of police.

Further protests are planned. Demonstrators say they will escalate their actions again if the government does not properly address their concerns. Hong Kong Watch's cofounder and chair, Benedict Rogers, stressed (in *UCA News*) that Hong Kongers "are pragmatists, not radicals". He went on to explain: "If Hong Kong people feel they have some say in their future, then they will — provided they are confident of the assurances — get off the streets, re-engage with the political system and restore calm and order and, crucially, confidence to Hong Kong's battered economic reputation. Hong Kongers are not, by nature, extremists. They are reasonable people. If they are persuaded that the legislators they elect will represent them, that there will be scope for universal suffrage to enable them to choose their chief executive, and that their rulers will listen to them and not push through absurd ill-thought-out draft legislation such as the extradition bill ever again, then maybe there is hope for a breakthrough."

## ***China's response***

The reaction in mainland China has shifted generally from indifference to outright hostility, with authorities first ignoring the protests, then misrepresenting them (especially via social media) and lately rejecting them entirely.

Images of the People's Armed Police arriving in convoys have been published by Chinese state media, accompanied by threats of intervention. But, when asked about the possibility of China intervening, Hong Kong police were adamant that "it won't happen". During a press briefing, the police went on to reassure those present that the Hong Kong police "can handle" the current crisis.

Some analysts maintain that China need not intervene in an obvious way since it has been eroding Hong Kong's autonomy for two decades, since the territory reverted back to China in 1997. Russell Hsiao (for the Jamestown Foundation) in his preliminary survey maintains that "the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) intervene and exercise influence in Hong Kong—through the PRC Liaison Office, political parties, media, academia, and community organisations—in order to promote the CCP's political agenda and undermine the influence of the territory's pro-democracy forces." He bases his conclusions on extensive research and many interviews. Hsiao concludes that the protests of 2003, 2014, and now 2019 serve as indicators that Beijing's strategy has gained influence in Hong Kong but not affection, and a time may come when China deems it necessary to intervene. For now, however, it would appear that time has not yet come, and China remains content to continue exerting influence in other, less obvious ways.

### **FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Elizabeth Kendal, in her Religious Liberty Bulletin of 7 August, offers a snapshot of what is at stake as Hong Kong teeters on the precipice, facing a possible breakthrough or potential crackdown. Hong Kong is home to approximately 850,000 Christians (12.4 percent of the population, according to OMF), about 1,500 churches and 35 Bible colleges. It has long been "a vital nerve centre for [Christian] media" (*Operation World*, 2010) and "the springboard for evangelising on the mainland" (*TIME*, March 2018). The Hong Kong Church has long maintained that its primary role, in God's great purpose, is to support the mainland Church and its massive mission movement. *TIME*'s Laignee Barron writes that Hong Kong "with its greater freedoms and religious liberties has played a vital role in oxygenating the growth of Christianity on the mainland". It does this, Barron explains, by maintaining "a vital lifeline, supplying everything from monetary support, to Bibles, to blacklisted Christian literature, to training and assistance founding new churches". The Gospel has been smuggled over the border in every format imaginable, including broadcasts on pirate radio waves and dissemination via USB flash drives. "They need our help," says Hong Kong's retired Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen, "because we are in the freer world and they are not".

In the current protests, the Hong Kong Church has also endeavoured to be an influential voice for the good. Hong Kong's Church leaders have appealed to the Hong Kong government, urging it to take the initiative and resolve the crisis by withdrawing the extradition bill, launching an independent inquiry into police responses and facilitating mediation. The Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong, Paul Kwong, also wrote to parishioners urging them to resist violence in all its forms, and instructing them instead to "rebuild Hong Kong through the grace of the cross, making her a 'Pearl of the Orient' that can shine the glory of Christ and the radiance of humanity."

### **PRAY**

- **For humility and wisdom among decision-makers**
- **For protesters to remain calm and peaceful and to avoid violence**
- **For believers to be a source of hope in times of turmoil**

### **IMAGE SOURCE:**

[https://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/imagecache/mbdxlarge/mritems/Images/2019/8/17/5007b490384d4e4783ee0a465434fe6f\\_18.jpg](https://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/imagecache/mbdxlarge/mritems/Images/2019/8/17/5007b490384d4e4783ee0a465434fe6f_18.jpg)