

The State of the World's Human Rights; Hong Kong (China) 2025

On 26 November, a fire at the Wang Fuk Court housing complex in Tai Po district killed 168 people, making it Hong Kong's third deadliest fire on record. Authorities swiftly suppressed calls for accountability, arresting at least four individuals and hampering or intimidating efforts to report publicly on the incident and the government's response.¹

LGBTI people's rights

Lack of legal recognition persisted for same-sex marriage and partnerships. Following a 2023 ruling by the highest court, which required the government to establish a framework for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships by October 2025, the government proposed a Registration of Same-Sex Partnerships Bill, granting narrow rights tied to partnerships registered overseas. The legislature rejected it in September.²

Freedom of expression

Authorities continued to weaponize and expand the scope of the National Security Law (NSL) and related laws to criminalize the exercising of the right to freedom of expression. Among cases prosecuted under national security-related legislation between July 2020 and June 2025, 85% of those involved the legitimate right to freedom of expression which should not have been criminalized; bail was denied in 89% of cases; and the average duration of pretrial detention was 11 months.³

In April, the father and brother of exiled activist Anna Kwok were arrested by the national security police. Her father was later charged under the 2024 Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) for "directly or indirectly" dealing with the finances of an absconder. The case was widely seen as retaliation for Anna Kwok's critical speech and activism abroad.

In May, the Hong Kong government enacted subsidiary legislation under the SNSO, introducing six new offences. The legislation also declared six locations of the Chinese national security offices as "prohibited places", barring people from approaching or passing through them. Also in May, the Education Bureau updated its policy to integrate national security across primary and secondary school curricula, imposing strict oversight on teaching materials and activities, significantly restricting freedom of expression on campuses.

In June, jailed activist Joshua Wong faced a new charge under the NSL of "conspiring to collude with foreign forces". This was for his advocacy allegedly urging foreign governments

to impose sanctions on Hong Kong or China.⁴ In July and August, two young people (aged 18 and 19) were charged with sedition for, respectively, writing “seditious” slogans on the wall of a shopping centre toilet and filming promotional videos for the overseas-based group Hong Kong Parliament, which the authorities had labelled “subversive”.

On 15 December, Jimmy Lai, the 78-year-old founder of the pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily, was convicted in a landmark national security case. The High Court found him guilty of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and to commit sedition, despite his not-guilty pleas. Lai had spent more than five years behind bars before the conviction, much of it in solitary confinement. During the 156-day trial, Lai argued that Apple Daily’s outspoken stance was protected expression. The judges rejected his defence and described him as a “mastermind” behind conspiracies to destabilize the Chinese government. He faced a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, with sentencing expected in early 2026.

Court rulings also impacted on freedom of expression with respect to other laws. In March, the High Court upheld the legality of section 27A of the Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Conduct) Ordinance, finding that the criminalization of public incitement to abstain or cast invalid votes during elections was constitutional on grounds of preserving “election integrity”.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Authorities continued to obstruct peaceful public assembly. On 4 June, police deployed heavy patrols and conducted searches around Victoria Park, a traditional site for the commemorations of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Police arrested two individuals and took another 10 people to police stations for their attempts to mourn, with some carrying flowers or candles.

In July, Pink Dot Hong Kong cancelled its annual Pride event, citing the government’s refusal to allow use of the usual event venue.

Freedom of association

The city’s two remaining major pro-democracy parties, the Democratic Party and the League of Social Democrats, officially disbanded in April and June respectively, amid political pressure. Also in June, the Legislative Council passed the Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill. The bill banned anyone convicted of national security offences from serving in trade unions; empowered the government to reject union registrations based on national security grounds; and required unions to seek approval before receiving foreign funding.

In July, police issued arrest warrants and bounties on 15 overseas-based activists for their involvement in the group Hong Kong Parliament. Also in July, four people, including a 15-year-old boy, were arrested under the NSL for “conspiring to subvert state power” due to alleged connections with Taiwan-based Hong Kong Democratic Independence Union. On 2 December, authorities officially imposed a ban on the two groups from operating in the city, citing them as a threat to national security under the SNSO.

Inhumane detention conditions

In July, the government amended the Prison Rules, granting the Correctional Services Department broad powers to restrict prisoners' visits and meetings with lawyers on vague "national security" grounds.

Interviews with nine former prisoners revealed a series of human rights violations in custody during their incarceration across 11 correctional facilities. These included physical violence, prolonged solitary confinement, poor sanitary conditions and dangerously high summer temperatures.⁵

In October, Chow Hang-tung was held in solitary confinement for 18 days after she made an online speech on having been nominated for the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize.

Workers' rights

In June, the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) dismissed a judicial review filed by a migrant domestic helper, who argued that the absence of a dedicated forced labour law in Hong Kong had led the police to fail to investigate effectively her complaint of forced labour. The CFA held that the enactment of bespoke legislation criminalizing forced labour was not necessary to provide practical and effective protection of the rights of foreign domestic helpers.

