

UK Condemns Hong Kong Bounties on Exiled Democracy Activists

July 27, 2025

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The United Kingdom has strongly denounced Hong Kong's latest attempt to silence dissent beyond its borders, after authorities in the Chinese territory placed bounties on several exiled pro-democracy activists now living in Britain.

On Friday, Hong Kong officials announced cash rewards ranging from HK\$200,000 to HK\$1 million (approximately \$25,000 to \$125,000) for information leading to the arrest of 19 individuals accused of violating Beijing's controversial National Security Law legislation that has drawn global condemnation since its imposition in 2020. Many of the targeted activists resettled in the UK under a bespoke visa pathway introduced in 2021 following Beijing's crackdown on political freedoms in the former British colony.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper issued a joint statement condemning the move as "transnational repression," a term increasingly used to describe authoritarian regimes pursuing political opponents abroad.

"The Hong Kong Police Force's issuing of further arrest warrants and bounties on individuals living in the UK is another example of transnational repression," the ministers said.

Though the statement offered strong words, some critics have questioned the current government's broader stance, particularly in light of recent proposals to amend extradition laws, changes that have stirred unease within Hong Kong diaspora communities. Extradition to Hong Kong from the UK was suspended in 2020 after the national security law came into effect, amid widespread concerns over legal fairness and political persecution.

With over 150,000 Hong Kong residents having relocated to Britain in the past few years, many now fear the government could be sending mixed signals. Any potential softening of the UK's extradition position would likely provoke backlash not only from the public but also from allies concerned about appeasing Beijing.

Lammy and Cooper emphasised that the UK remains committed to protecting those who have sought refuge. "This Government will continue to stand with the people of Hong Kong, including those who have made the UK their home. We take the protection of their rights, freedoms, and safety very seriously," the joint statement read.

This marks the fourth time Hong Kong has publicly offered bounties for overseas dissidents. Previous announcements were met with strong pushback from Western governments, which Beijing routinely accuses of meddling in China's internal affairs.

As China continues to expand its reach in policing dissent worldwide, Britain faces a pivotal moment balancing diplomatic engagement with the Chinese regime while safeguarding the rights of those who fled it.