



The Law Society
of England and Wales



therightspractice
partnerships for rights and justice

Urgent concern for the conviction and sentencing of lawyer Chow Hang-tung

Lawyers for Lawyers, Asian Lawyers Network, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, The Law Society of England and Wales and The Rights Practice express grave concern over the [sentencing of human rights barrister](#) Chow Hang-tung to seven years and three months on charges of incitement to subversion under Hong Kong SAR's national security laws. On 11 September 2026, the court also sentenced former legislator Lee Cheuk-yan to seven years' imprisonment, while lawyer and former legislator Albert Ho received five years and two months after pleading guilty earlier this year in connection with the same case.

Background and proceedings against Chow Hang-tung

Chow Hang-tung was charged in 2021, together with Lee Cheuk-yan and Albert Ho, in connection with their roles in the Hong Kong Alliance and the organisation of peaceful vigils commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. The charges were brought under the 2020 National Security Law which criminalises any act of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces in Hong Kong SAR.

Since the National Security Law entered into force on 30 June 2020, Chow Hang-tung has faced repeated arrests, prolonged pre-trial detention, and periods of solitary confinement for her legitimate human rights work. On 8 September 2021, authorities first detained her in connection with her role in the Hong Kong Alliance. After the government enacted additional national security legislation under Article 23 on 23 March 2024, the police brought new charges against her on 28 May 2024, alleging that her social-media posts about the Tiananmen anniversary "incited hatred" against Beijing. Following more than four years in detention, her trial opened on 22 January 2026. She was subsequently convicted and, on 11 September 2026, sentenced to seven years and three months' imprisonment. In determining the sentence, the court characterised the offence as being "of a serious nature", despite acknowledging that the case involved no violence or threat of violence and that no specific means or timetable had been proposed to achieve the stated objective of "ending one-party dictatorship".

Broader concerns over national security legislation in Hong Kong SAR

This case forms part of a broader pattern in Hong Kong SAR in which national security legislation has been used to target lawyers carrying out their professional responsibilities and exercising their right to freedom of expression. Following the sentencing, the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), called for these sentences to be quashed and reiterated his call for the National Security Law to be brought in line with China's international human rights law obligations.



The Law Society
of England and Wales



therightspractice
partnerships for rights and justice

UN human rights mechanisms have repeatedly raised concerns about the compatibility of Hong Kong SAR's national security framework with international human rights standards. [UN Special Procedures](#) have highlighted serious concerns regarding the impact of national security proceedings on essential due process guarantees and the right to a fair trial. [The UN Human Rights Committee](#) has likewise found that the National Security Law is interpreted and applied in an overly broad and arbitrary manner, creating structural risks for judicial independence and procedural safeguards. Taken together, these assessments point to a broader pattern in which national security legislation is used to restrict fundamental freedoms and hinder lawyers and civil society actors from carrying out their legitimate work.

Protection of lawyers under international standards

The prosecution, conviction and sentencing of Chow Hang-tung raise serious concerns under international standards protecting the independence of the legal profession and the rights to freedom of expression, liberty and a fair trial. The undersigned organisations recall that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) continues to apply in Hong Kong SAR and requires respect for, among others, the right to freedom of expression under Article 19, the right to a fair trial under Article 14, and the right to liberty and security of person and protection against arbitrary detention under Article 9.

These obligations are further reinforced by the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. Principle 16 requires authorities to ensure that lawyers are able to perform their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. Principle 18 provides that lawyers must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their professional duties. Principle 23 further affirms that lawyers, like other citizens, are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly, including the right to take part in public discussion concerning the law, the administration of justice, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

Therefore, our organisations urge the relevant authorities to:

- quash the conviction and sentence imposed on Chow Hang-tung and immediately and unconditionally release her, insofar as her detention results from the legitimate exercise of her rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- ensure full respect for fair-trial and due-process guarantees during any appeal proceedings;
- repeal or amend all laws that erode the rule of law, judicial independence and fair trial rights in Hong Kong SAR, including the national security law, to bring them in line with international human rights;
- ensure that national security legislation is applied in a manner consistent with Hong Kong SAR's international human rights obligations, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;



The Law Society
of England and Wales



therightspractice
partnerships for rights and justice

- ensure compliance with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, including the obligation to protect lawyers from prosecution or other sanctions arising from the legitimate exercise of their profession and fundamental freedoms;
- to safeguard the ability of lawyers and civil society actors to participate in public discussion on matters relating to human rights, the administration of justice and the rule of law.

Signatories

Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)

Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE)

International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)

The Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW)

The Rights Practice