



**Statement of U.S. Representative
Christopher Smith, Cochairman of the
Congressional-Executive Commission on
China (CECC)**

**CECC Roundtable on “Prospects for
Democracy and Press Freedom in Hong Kong”**

April 3, 2014

Today’s roundtable examines the prospects for democracy and press freedom in Hong Kong. Thanks to our two guests, Martin Lee and Anson Chan, for joining us here today, and for their years of dedication to working for freedom and democracy in Hong Kong. We look forward to hearing their thoughts on the future of Hong Kong.

Under the “one country, two systems” model, China guaranteed that Hong Kong could retain its separate political, legal, and economic systems for at least 50 years. Hong Kong’s constitution, the Basic Law, protects the rights of the people of Hong Kong to free speech, assembly, and the power to choose their own government, ultimately through universal suffrage.

This is clearly what is wanted by the people of Hong Kong, but increasingly, it seems, Beijing is unprepared to allow the people of Hong Kong to select leaders of their own choosing.

Although China’s central government agreed that universal suffrage would be implemented in time for the 2017 Chief Executive elections, recent statements by Chinese officials raise concerns that results will be fixed permanent in Beijing’s favor.

In Beijing, Qiao Xiaoyang, head of the Law Committee of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, demanded not only that candidates for Chief Executive must “love the country and love Hong Kong,” but also that they must “not confront the central government.”

In Hong Kong, Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen stated that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not apply to Hong Kong’s elections, despite the fact that Article 39 of Hong Kong’s Basic Law clearly states that the ICCPR would remain in force in Hong Kong after the 1997 handover.

Beijing’s attempt to stack the deck against democracy is disappointing, but not surprising to those who have watched China continually backpedal on its promises to the people of Hong Kong.

The freedoms of the people of Hong Kong to choose their own government, to vote freely, and to stand for election are being called into question when there should be no question.

Hong Kong's continued autonomy and the advance of its democracy is a concern of the U.S. Congress and of freedom-loving peoples everywhere.

We are also concerned about the steady erosion of press freedoms in Hong Kong. According to the Press Index published by Reporters Without Borders, over the past decade Hong Kong's ranking has dropped from 34th to 61st.

Two recent attacks have drawn attention to the deteriorating state of freedom of the press. In February of this year, Kevin Lau, recently dismissed as editor of the Ming Pao newspaper, was severely injured in a knife attack in broad day light. Less than a month later, two employees of the Hong Kong Morning News were beaten with metal pipes by masked men.

Earlier this year, after outspoken radio host Li Wei-ling was fired, she publicly blamed the Chief Executive and the government of Hong Kong for pressuring her radio station in order to "[suppress]... freedom of the press."

This trend is a chilling reminder that Beijing seeks to control both the media and the political process in Hong Kong. These actions raise critical questions whether the "one country, two systems" model can ever fully guarantee human rights and democracy for the people of Hong Kong.

If given a real choice, people everywhere vote to advance representative governments that protect the rule of law and the fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and religion. The people of Mainland China do not have such a choice and attempts to pursue universally-recognized rights are often met with brutality and harassment.

This cannot be Hong Kong's future.

Hong Kong is the true embodiment of the "China Dream" and that fact may scare some in the Communist Party. We stand with those who want Hong Kong to remain free, vital, prosperous, and democratic—as Beijing has long promised.