

NEWS and VIEWS

HONG KONG CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

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Church ministers discuss impact of Hong Kong national security law

The Justice and Social Concern Committee of the Hong Kong Christians Council held a videoconference in August on the Hong Kong National Security Law. This article is a summary of the views, concerns and ideas shared at that conference.



Background

On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong officially became a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. Under the Basic Law, the SAR was implemented with a high degree of autonomy under the principles of "One Country, Two Systems" and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong". At the same time, Article 23 of the Basic Law stipulates that the Government should pass legislation for safeguard national security. However, in the past 23 years since the establishment of the SAR, the HK Government has been unable to pass Article 23 legislation. Facing recent developments in Hong Kong and the current international situation, the National People's Congress (NPC) decided that it is necessary to enact the Hong Kong National Security Law (HKNSL), which was passed by the Standing Committee of the NPC on 30 June 2020, after which it was promulgated with immediate effect in Hong Kong.



The churches respond

The Standing Committee of the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) issued a response on 5 June before the passage of the HKNSL that stated the law should be consistent with the common-law principles of the Hong Kong judicial system, and the enforcement and judicial mechanisms of the relevant institutions of the HKNSL should be conducted in accordance with Hong Kong law in an open and fair manner. The HKCC said the law should fully guarantee human rights and all types of freedoms that have been enjoyed in the past, as well as the freedom of the church in Hong Kong to continue to communicate and cooperate with the international and mainland Christian communities. Finally, the HKCC also called on churches and Christian communities in Hong Kong to express their opinions on the provisions of the HKNSL.

The Vine Church, an international church in Hong Kong, responded to the Council's call and issued a statement on 17 July, saying that the government should establish an independent review body to monitor and report on the impact of the HKNSL on those freedoms Hong Kong people cherished and should provide transparent review procedures to regularly assess the impact of the HKNSL on the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong.

The Archbishop and Primate of the Anglican Church of Hong Kong, the Most Revd Dr Paul Kwong, wrote in the Church Times in early July that he backed the enactment of the HKNSL, and believed that the law would help Hong Kong restore law and order in the deteriorating violent environment. He said the law was necessary for protection of the people of Hong Kong, and insisted that the Law would not threaten religious freedom.



Reaction of believers

Meanwhile, many believers of various denominations initiated an online petition to gather co-signatures for a statement that was jointly published in newspapers before the HKNSL was passed. The statement – which included signatures from members of the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, the Chinese Christian Church and the Baptist Church, as well as various believers and pastors such as the Missionary Society and the Assemblies of God – opposed the enactment of the HKNSL, saying that it would undermine the promise of "One Country, Two Systems", "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong", and a high degree of autonomy.



The law's influence on the churches

After the passage of the HKNSL, the number of demonstrations and scenes of conflict in Hong Kong has been greatly reduced, although the COVID-19 pandemic may also have been a factor in this drop. Officials in Beijing and Hong Kong have repeatedly emphasized that the HKNSL only covers four types of acts that endanger national security and only targets a very small number of offenders. However, after its implementation, many citizens continue to have reservations about the HKNSL, and believe it is a measure taken by the Government to control and eliminate the voices of all dissidents.

Meanwhile, some church leaders continue to maintain that the HKNSL will not interfere with freedom of religion in Hong Kong. Religious freedom is protected under the Article 32 of the Basic Law. If all religious activities are conducted in a manner that does not involve the four covered crimes (i.e. secession, subversion of state power, terrorist activities, and collusion with foreign countries or external forces to endanger national security), they say, there is no need to worry about the HKNSL.¹

Whatever anyone thinks about the enactment of the HKNSL, its far-reaching impact on Hong Kong is beyond doubt. And the question remains: what impact will the HKNSL ultimately have on the church in Hong Kong?

This was the question put to attendees of an August videoconference hosted by the HKCC's Justice and Social Concern Committee (JSCC) to exchange views on this issue.



Voices of the church ministers

Some members pointed out that because many countries also have national security laws, there is therefore nothing wrong with enacting the HKNSL in Hong Kong. Thus, as long as the church works within its legal framework, it should not be a big problem for the church. Some added that the enactment of the HKNSL has no impact on the poverty alleviation ministry of their organization in China.

Some pastors have doubts about the HKNSL because of insufficient definitions of the law's contents and its implementation – for example, what does and does not count as an act of secession, subversion or sedition? This can cause various difficulties in pastoral ministries, such as worrying whether a sermon would cross the "red-line" if the preacher says "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Some church workers don't know how to comfort and counsel believers who are worried because they participated in demonstrations. These church workers have rarely had in-depth theological reflections on politics or experience with political issues. They also need help indeed.

¹ Samuel W K Yung, "I can't see that the National Security Law does hinder religious freedom", Sing Tao Daily, August 26, 2020

To deepen knowledge and understanding of the HKNSL, some denominations held internal seminars and invited senior legal professors and scholars of Chinese church history to explain the content and influence of the HKNSL. Those who participated in the seminars said that they benefited a lot and were able to deepen their understanding of the subject. Afterwards, many of them continued the discussions in their own churches. Some members of JSCC suggested that since small and medium-sized churches may not be able to organize such lectures, HKCC could organize similar seminars on the legal knowledge of the HKNSL, so that church workers can understand the content of the law and those matters requiring special attention, and give feasible suggestions and practical guidelines for them.

However, some videoconference attendees said that the lack of information on the HKNSL may not be the fundamental issue, because in fact there is a lot of information on the Internet which is not difficult to obtain. The bigger issue is that the HKNSL has indeed changed many aspects and practices of “One Country, Two Systems”. It is the rapid changes and the gray areas in the implementation of the law that is causing problems in pastoral ministry and confidence in the future.

Many pastors are also faced with the loss of church members who are emigrating out of Hong Kong, or are fearful about the current and uncertain political situation, as well as the pandemic and the economic downturn. These pastors are frustrated because they don't know how to respond and care for the congregation in these uncertain times. Therefore, large-scale seminars may focus on preparing sermons, different points of view on immigration, church development and pastoral psychological needs, etc. But the inner struggle of church ministers does require personal care on an individual level.

Some audience members felt that it is natural for the church to have different opinions on whether to support or oppose the HKNSL, since different people will have various points of views and reactions on all kinds of issues. But for the church, first of all it is a fundamental issue of Christian faith – the church itself is not a political organization. We must be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we should follow His lead regardless of prosperity or adversity. Therefore, the church does not have to (and should not) worry about facing difficult situations or being suppressed because of faith. On the contrary, the greater challenge that the church may face in the future is the temptation of power and wealth. Therefore, the church must always scrutinize itself in order to be alert to those temptations.

Ultimately, this crisis of confidence is a spiritual issue. As such, some audience members suggested that apart from holding seminars to help ministers and believers understand the law, the HKCC may also organize gatherings such as prayer meetings or devotional meetings. Furthermore, the church needs to provide in-depth spiritual support, nurturing and counseling to believers, which must be carried out in small groups so that everyone knows and trusts each other. Therefore, with this new situation and an uncertain future, the models of churches and even pastoral care may need to be transformed and renewed. This is what the HKCC should explore with the churches, they said.



Conclusion

Finally, some members also suggested that as an organization to promote the unity of the church, besides holding seminars and other activities the HKCC should provide more channels to gather the voices and opinions of different believers. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how to increase opportunities for believers to express their opinions.

At this video meeting, the committee members were frank and sincere in expressing their views on the HKNSL and conveying the voices of church workers. Underlying the various opinions mentioned above is the fact that the committee members – and indeed many Christians – do have expectations of the HKCC on this issue. The purpose of the establishment of the HKCC is to serve as a bridge between churches, and between churches and society, to promote unity and to witness to the world the gospel of reconciliation of Christ. How HKCC can stay true to its role in this new situation is certainly a major challenge.

HKCC responds to neighbors in need in Beirut and Hong Kong

Emergency relief for Beirut Blast, Lebanon

A catastrophic blast rocked the port of Beirut, Lebanon on 4 August 2020, resulting in at least 150 casualties, as well as damage to properties as far as 24 km away from the epicenter. In response, the HKCC decided to grant a fund of US\$20,000 to support the emergency relief ministries carried out by Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Lebanon.



Photo source: YMCA Lebanon Facebook.

Emergency relief for COVID-19

The HKCC received numerous funding requests from local and international partners regarding emergency relief work against COVID-19. The resulting sponsorship list is as follows:

- A fund of US\$3,500 was granted to Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Hong Kong, to serve the needs of migrant workers in HK
- A fund of HK\$120,000 was granted to the Programme for Migrant Domestic Workers & Programme for Refugees by Christian Action, Hong Kong, to serve the needs of migrant workers and refugees in HK
- A fund of US\$3,100 was granted to Fullmoon Orphanage, Myanmar, to provide quality face masks and personal hygiene kits to needy children and the community
- A fund of US\$2,110 was granted to One-2-One Myanmar to provide quality face masks and personal hygiene kits to needy children and the community
- A fund of US\$13,000 was granted to National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) to provide emergency relief packs and quality face masks to families under quarantine
- A fund of HK\$77,000 was granted to Kowloon Union Church (KUC, Hong Kong) to support three parties in India – Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Love India, Need India Trust, and Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) – as well as one party in Malaysia (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants) – to serve the needs of deprived communities in India and Malaysia.



National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) delivers relief packs to local communities



Workers and children at Fullmoon Orphanage, Myanmar

We will continue to provide updates on the latest information. Meanwhile, we hereby urge you for your donation to help our neighbors in need. You can scan these QR codes to help us today.



Beirut Blast



COVID-19 relief

Radio ministry in the time of budget cuts and COVID-19

For over 20 years, the Religious Broadcasting & Television Advisory Committee (RBTAC) has been bringing messages of faith, love and hope to Hong Kong's airwaves via RTHK Radio 3 and Radio 4 with the production of two daily English-language programs – “Minutes That Matter” and “Reflections” – as well as our two Sunday programs, “Thought For The Week” and “Sunday Service, which features live church service broadcasts and special recorded services.

As you can imagine, it's been a challenging year for the English radio ministry, not least because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With churches closed due to social distancing restrictions, many scheduled live Sunday service broadcasts had to be cancelled, leaving us with the challenge of filling in that hour.

But God has helped us find ways to keep the broadcasts going. As churches adapted to the pandemic by taking their services online via Facebook Live and YouTube, we have worked with those churches to find ways to record the audio from their webcasts and use them to replace the radio broadcast with quality recordings for RTHK to use instead. In cases where churches don't have online services, we have been able to use archived recordings of previous services, updated with new material (such as intercession prayers) edited into the older recording. So all up, we have been able to keep church services on the air even when the churches were closed to the public.

However, our greater challenge of 2020 has been one that many churches and NGOs are also all too familiar with: budget cuts.

RBTAC's English radio ministry depends on contributions and donations to cover program production costs – however, a significant source of funding was withdrawn at the end of June, leaving us without enough money to hire a full-time producer to replace outgoing producer Rev. Dr. Judy Chan.

We were able to hire a part-time producer, John Tanner, to keep our two Sunday programs running until the end of the year. However, as of July 6 we had to temporarily suspend production of “Minutes That Matter” and “Reflections”. The good news is that RTHK has agreed to reinstate these programs to their original time slots in 2021 – provided we can raise enough funds to cover the production costs.

To that end, RBTAC is launching a fundraising campaign in September with an ambitious goal of raising HK\$700,000 to get our radio ministry back up to full steam.

RBTAC believes in the power of radio to reach millions of people in Hong Kong in ways that podcasts and online streaming cannot. So we're asking for your help to enable our English radio ministry to return to full strength in 2021.

Whether you're a regular listener or have just recently discovered our programs, we pray that you can help us however you can. Scan the QR code to find out how, or visit the HKCC donation page at <https://www.hkcc.org.hk/donation>.



Ecumenical Summer Internship Program 2020



Opening ceremony in Kowloon Union Church on 9 June

Since 2007, the Ecumenical Summer Internship Program have been serving as a platform to gather youths and theological students in Hong Kong. Every year, around 10 students are enrolled in a summer internship program, in which they are given the chance to experience their own ecumenical journey by taking on community pastoral roles with help from local churches and NGOs.

In 2020, the program took on 10 students from Divinity School of Chung Chi College CUHK, Bible Seminary of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University. The program ran from 9 June to 11 August 2020, and covered four different topics: Community Shepherding, Gender Justice, Policy Advocacy and Eco Justice.

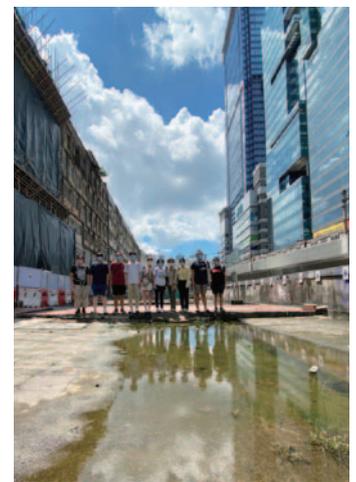
The students were allocated to nine churches or NGOs under the following breakdown by topic:

Community Shepherding: Kowloon Union Church, Kei Shun Church of Love (The Church of Christ in China)

Gender Justice: Midnight Blue, Hong Kong Christian Council, One Body in Christ

Eco Justice: Save Lantau Alliance, Society for Indigenous Learning

Policy Advocacy: Hong Kong Christian Institute, Kwun Tong Methodist Social Service



Kwun Tong Community walk between the old and the new on 11 June

Personal experiences

The program requires students to perform daily internship duties under the mentor's supervision in the assigned church or NGO. This enables them to get up close and experience first-hand how these churches and NGOs incorporate the faiths and reflections of their ministries regarding the specific assigned topic. Here are the experiences each of the students shared with us.

Cool Lau and Lau Shu-man jointly worked with Rev. Carol Lau in Kei Shun Church of Love, which serves children with autism or SEN (special education needs). Both students had lots of reflections to share after their fellowship with the children – they witnessed the pureness of the children and truly believed they could see the image of Jesus in them. However, they also witnessed the difficulties these children experience daily when it comes to social norms and prejudices – not just in school, but also in mainstream society.

Amanda Cheung spent her internship with the Hong Kong Christian Council focusing mainly on sexual

harassment issues in the church. She has always wanted to be a pastor in the future after she completes her theological education. However, the program confronted her with the difficult fact that there are so many sexual harassment cases happening in churches, many of which are handled by denying the problem exists, which hurts both the victims of sexual harassment and the church community overall. She learned that the challenge ahead is how to build a church with mutual trust and a safe church. This is not her own personal challenge – it's a challenge for everyone in the church, including you and me.



Nonviolent Communication Workshop on 18 June



Visit to Society for Indigenous Learning (which focuses on Eco Justice issues) in Hong Kong on 9 July

Huen Huen and Jacky Wong were focused on the issue of policy advocacy, but experienced difficulties with reaching out to the public because of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Their objective was to build up a network of people and build relationships with them to collect their views on Hong Kong's housing problem and reveal the result. But because of social gathering restrictions, they had to patiently stay indoors and study tons of information. Eventually, they learned that it really takes time to bring about policy changes, build up relationships, and distinguish the differences between personal interests and the public will.

Shek Sau-yin and Lap Kan spent their internships with Save Lantau Alliance and Society for Indigenous Learning, respectively. This meant traveling two to three hours every day to the NGO respective locations in Fan Lan and Tai O. As it happens, the significant geographical distance they had to traverse each day also served as a metaphor for the reality that mainstream culture views Eco Justice as “far away” from our daily life, “time-consuming”, “costly and inefficient”, and useless against development. The long travel time granted the students valuable space to think more deeply about these issues, and encouraged them to jointly bridge the cultural gaps among public via daily life practices.

Collective reflections

The 10 interns completed feedback forms afterwards. Most of them commented that the program was scheduled with a plentiful number of seminars, sharing sessions, church and NGOs visits, workshops, spiritual formation, and tutorials, and that all of these components helped them to incorporate theological training into the real-world practice of internship duties. The individual practice and collective experience they gained from the program broadened their horizons, prepared them well for their pastoral service in different dimensions, and encouraged them to join the local ecumenical movement.



First ever Zoom closing ceremony on 11 August

Internship under COVID-19

Because of COVID-19, the retreat camp originally scheduled for 11-13 June was replaced by a three-day event, so as to avoid unnecessary social contact. The internship activities and students' duty roster had to be adjusted accordingly in the later period of the program. Also, the closing ceremony scheduled for the evening of 11 August was changed and broadcast on Zoom.

We look forward to next year's program in the hope that that we can go through the whole internship meeting face to face instead.



HKCS Continues to Help the Needy during Pandemic

Hong Kong has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of the year. While most social services have been postponed, HKCS has not stopped helping those in need, and has maintained basic services. For example, the clinic located on the first floor of the headquarter building has kept most of its services running during the pandemic, and has adopted procedures to protect both colleagues and patients. The clinic also provides a deep throat saliva test for patients with mild symptoms. Meanwhile, our five Integrated Home Care Service Teams (IHCSTs) continue to provide meal delivery and escorting services to help the elderly live with ease during this critical period. The teams have fine-tuned their services to reduce the risk of both our colleagues and the elderly getting infected – for example, by substituting food jars with lunch boxes, wearing personal protective equipment when escorting the elderly to hospitals, and calling the elderly regularly to get updates on their status, etc.



HKCS Annual Report Wins Two Prizes at ARC Awards

HKCS won prizes at the 2020 Annual Report Competition (ARC) Awards for two categories: “NGO – Print Annual Report” and “Printing and Production”. The ARC Awards are globally recognized, and provide a platform for the highest standards in the annual report industry. The judging of each annual report is based on its success in communicating its institution’s story.

On the cover of the HKCS 2018/19 Annual Report, you’ll see five hands belonging to people of different age and race resting on a tree trunk in the sunlight. This image represents HKCS’s mission of instilling hope and promoting harmony in the community.

