



25 October 2019

Mr Robert Mahoney
Deputy Executive Director
Committee to Protect Journalists
330 7th Avenue, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001 USA

Dear Mr Mahoney,

Thank you for your letter of 9 October 2019 to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). I am authorised to reply on her behalf.

Freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of association are guaranteed rights and freedoms under the Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitutional document. For many years, Hong Kong has been a regional media hub, with a vibrant and very robust local media scene and a large presence of international media – print, digital, TV and radio. The freedom of the press is very much alive and well in Hong Kong and media act entirely independently in producing their reports. Journalists have not been silenced or prevented from carrying out their duties in Hong Kong during the recent protests. If you require proof that media are operating freely, look no further than the thousands of pages and hundreds of hours of TV coverage on the current protests in Hong Kong.

中華人民共和國香港特別行政區行政長官辦公室
Office of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

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As a matter of principle and law, the HKSAR Government rejects and deplores the use of violence against anyone for any purpose and on any occasion. Police will actively investigate illegal and violent acts to bring offenders to justice, whoever they may be.

Any dissatisfaction relating to police enforcement actions are best handled by the existing and well-established Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) set up for exactly this purpose. The IPCC is also undertaking a fact-finding study, under its powers, on the handling of large-scale public order events that have taken place since 9 June 2019. The study aims to ascertain the facts, assess the police handling of protests, and to make recommendations to the Government. A panel of international experts will assist the IPCC in this work, findings of which will be made public. The IPCC aims to finish the first phase report within six months.

Like other law enforcement agencies throughout the world, the Hong Kong Police Force's main responsibility is to maintain law and order. Police respect the freedom of the press and the rights of the media to report on public events and incidents, which have included many large protest marches, rampant vandalism of public and private property, violent attacks on Police carrying out their lawful duties and physical assault of people holding different views. Police will, as far as practicably possible, deploy members of the Force Media Liaison Cadre to facilitate media reporting at public incidents on the understanding that it does not compromise the effectiveness of Police operations. Police have also appealed to media workers to be mindful of their own personal safety when covering public events and large-scale demonstrations. As such,

media workers should proactively avoid standing between Police and protesters (i.e. “zero distance”) when an operation to disperse an unlawful assembly or violent protest is underway. Police have explained these basic principles to the media and industry groups on many occasions and remain open to further dialogue with media workers and representative groups to foster professional relations and a deeper understanding of both sides’ work. As a matter of fact, the Police most recently met with the Foreign Correspondents’ Club on 10 October 2019 to discuss issues surrounding coverage of the protests during which both sides explained their positions and gave responses in the spirit of mutual trust and constructive engagement. We remain open to such dialogue with professional bodies.

We understand that the ongoing, blanket coverage of protests in Hong Kong may have created some negative perceptions or misconceptions about general safety in Hong Kong. The fact is, though, Hong Kong remains one of the world’s safest large cities underpinned by the rule of law and an independent judiciary. We fully understand the vital importance of the free and unfettered flow of information, and a free and open media environment, to Hong Kong’s success past, present and future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald Cheng".

(Ronald Cheng)

for Private Secretary to Chief Executive