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Published on July 27, 2022 18:21. Updated on August 09, 2022 09:17.

UN human rights committee: repeal China-backed Hong Kong security law

By [Liv Martin](#)



UN experts have urged authorities in Hong Kong to repeal its controversial national security law, which they criticised for enabling the government to crack down on freedoms and civil society.

Hong Kong’s law was hastily passed by China in 2020 without consulting Hong Kong, a special administrative region of 7.5 million citizens within China. According to the UN, the law has resulted in over 200 arrests.

“It’s important that we stress that any new security law that is to be adopted needs to go through an inclusive and transparent process, which was lacking at the adoption of the current act,” Vasilka Sancin, vice-chair of the Human Rights Committee, told journalists in Geneva on Wednesday.

The UN Human Rights Committee released its findings on Hong Kong as part of its work overseeing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a treaty that commits states to respect individuals’ civil and political rights. Hong Kong is a signatory but China is not. The committee also examined Macao, China, Georgia, Ireland, Luxembourg and Uruguay.

The committee’s findings specifically expressed concern over Hong Kong’s judicial system. Vice-chair Christopher Arif Bulkan highlighted a lack of judicial independence, and described a broken system where the government hand-picks “special” judges from a secret list who are willing to agree with the security law.

The law also allows cases to be transferred from Hong Kong to mainland China to carry out the judicial process, Bulkan added.

“There is this conundrum, if you will, that China is not a party [to the ICCPR], but then China can implement the NSL [national security law] within Hong Kong. So that creates a sort of lacuna for residents of Hong Kong in terms of where do you get redress,” he said.

The committee additionally brought attention to the ways in which the law can stifle freedoms of association, assembly, press, speech and expression. Since the law was enacted, there has been a widespread crackdown on civil society organisations, and many have been forced to shutter. During discussions with Hong Kong, experts also asked why the law was being used to punish citizens for basic forms of expression, such as publishing children's books or clapping in court.

However, the committee said after its dialogue with Hong Kong, representatives seemed open to creating a new national security law.

“They gave us assurances, which we welcomed, that when enacting a new security law, there would be transparency and consultation and so on. So, based on the dialogue, we have to be hopeful,” Bulkan said.

Macao, China’s other special administrative region, has faced some similar challenges to Hong Kong, such as affronts to the public’s right to peacefully assemble, and the use of recording devices by police. Furthermore, the committee found migrant workers in Macao are often exploited and forced to pay high fees to recruitment agencies.

Though both special administrative regions are run by the principle of “one country, two systems” – that is, they fall under China’s sovereignty, but have their own governments – the line between Hong Kong and Macao’s autonomy and China’s control appears to be shrinking.

An interim report from Hong Kong is scheduled to be shared with the committee in 2025 to analyse any improvements or setbacks to its human rights situation.

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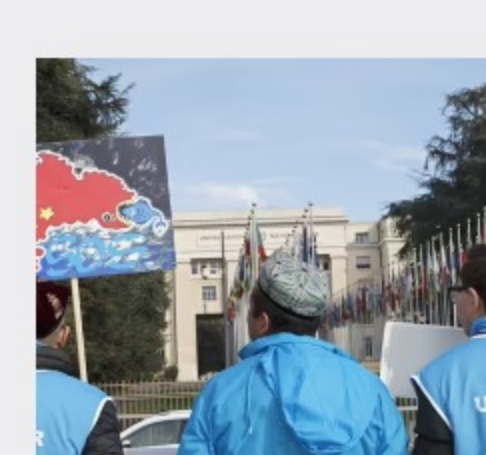
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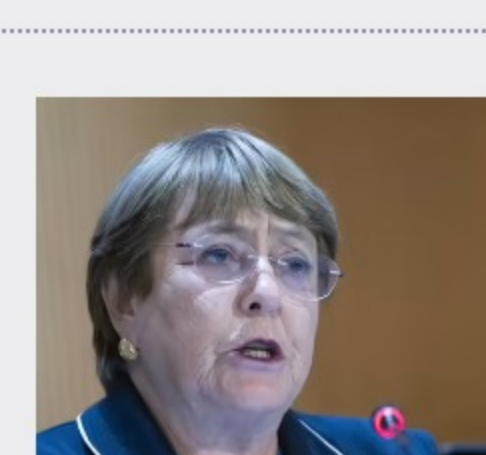
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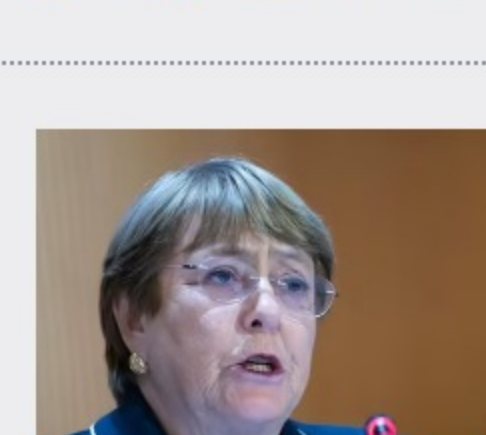
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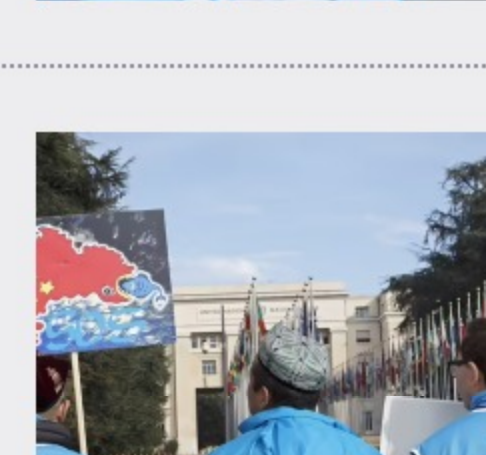
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