

House of Commons  
Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM)  
Special Immigration and Refugee Measures for the People of Hong Kong  
Mabel Tung, Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement

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February 17, 2021 17:30 to 19:30

Distinguished members of the Committee,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement (VSSDM) was founded in June, 1989 after the June 4th Tiananmen Square Massacre. The organization works to advocate and advance democracy, freedom, and human rights. We also offer support to those who left China for Canada to flee political persecution, so that they could become contributing members of Canadian society.

Ever since Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997, its people have strived to protect their way of life and their system of government. In July 2020, China imposed a sweeping National Security Law, stripping the city of any remnants of autonomy, civil and social freedom. Tens of thousands turned out to protest this new legislation; thousands were arrested and hundreds were imprisoned.

In 2021, the mass arrests have intensified. Pro-democracy legislators, democracy activists, a media tycoon, and a human right lawyer are on the list. Some are held, being denied bail.

Many Hongkongers who participated in the movement fear they will face the same fate as the student protestors in Tiananmen Square 32 years ago. They look to western democracies for protection and safe-harboring. Already 46 Hong Kong citizens are seeking asylum in Canada.

We urge the Government of Canada to lend your support to Hongkongers seeking political asylum. We welcome the new open work permits for Hong Kong residents announced by Minister Mendicino. It is a major step when it comes to helping young activists become integrated into Canadian society. To make the new policy more accessible to the activists under imminent persecution, we submit the following recommendations:

- 1. Appoint a designated commissioner within the Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong to handle, with utmost confidentiality, cases from political asylum seekers, including vetting, background checking, evidence gathering to establish the validity of their claims. This commissioner can enlist the help of prominent Canadian civil rights organizations such as VSSDM, which have direct connections with Hong Kong civil society. In urgent situations, we recommend providing Temporary Resident Permits with special quotas to activists who need to leave Hong Kong and complete the application process within Canada.**
- 2. Broaden Family reunification, including for siblings and extended family. This would be another way for more young activists to flee Hong Kong. Again, in urgent situations, we also recommend providing Temporary Resident Permits to activists who need to leave Hong Kong and complete their application within Canada.**
- 3. Provide grants or loans to asylum seekers. Instead of applying for refugee status, asylum seekers would receive a loan to further their studies, and they would pay back the loan in the same way that one pays back student loans. This way, the Federal government would not be required to pay any financial assistance, thereby saving taxpayers' money. Furthermore, this would save the activists from having to live through a year of uncertainty.**
- 4. Support former Canadian citizens who returned to Hong Kong and ran for public office in the pan-democracy camp. These Canadians were required to give up their Canadian citizenship. These legislators have subsequently been either disqualified to run or stripped**

of their seats under the National Security Law. We ask that the Canadian government grant them pathways to regain their Canadian citizenship, such as giving them permanent resident status to work towards citizenship.

5. Extend the visas of Hongkongers currently residing in Canada under the Temporary Work Permit, who participated in protest actions in various Canadian cities since 2019. They face an uncertain future. They fear returning to Hong Kong only to be arrested or barred from leaving the city, or remaining in Canada without proper status. We recommend allowing for an application to extend their existing visa to a 5-year visa with an expedited pathway towards obtaining permanent resident status.
6. Allow students with 60 university credits to apply for the open work permit. The current open work permit scheme allows graduates of recognized two-year diploma programs within the last 5 years to apply. However, those enrolled in four-year university programs will have to complete their 4-year programs to apply. Yet, many currently enrolled university students who participated in the recent protests and demonstrations are subject to police brutality. Many have pending trials. We recommend allowing current university students who had completed a minimum of 60 credits (equivalent to two years of study) to apply for open work permits.
7. Extend the open work permit eligibility to 10 years after graduation. The fight to preserve freedom and democracy in Hong Kong began in 2014 when hundreds of thousands marched to demand universal suffrage to elect the Chief Executive and legislature as promised in the Basic Law. The movement led to the 2019 Anti-extradition to China movement and the 2020 National Security Law. Many of those who participated in the 2014 movement would have graduated more than 5 years ago and would not be eligible to apply for the open work permits. These graduates may have more than 5 years of work experience, are likely self-sufficient, and can con-

**tribute immediately to Canada. We recommend extending the graduation time limit to 10 years for the open work permit program.**

HongKongers are now desperate for your help. Their fight is difficult, dangerous, and almost impossible, but their cause is just.

I urge the distinguished members of the Committee to give these recommendations your serious attention, and lend your support towards opening our doors to those facing political persecution.

Thank you.