

VIEW FALUN GONG WITH AN OPEN HEART

A Joint Statement of Christian Organizations in Hong Kong
February 8, 2001

Background

On Jan. 14, 2001, members of Falun Gong in Hong Kong hosted an international conference at City Hall that attracted an audience of more than 1,000 Falun Gong practitioners from around the world. As part of the activities related to the conference, Falun Gong members marched to the Central Government Liaison Office and discussed during their meeting how their members were being persecuted on the mainland.

Prior to the conference, pro-Beijing newspapers and pro-China political figures in Hong Kong criticized the Hong Kong government for allowing Falun Gong to use a government venue for their meeting. After the conference, the same sections of society said that Falun Gong was trying to transform Hong Kong into a base of subversion against the Chinese government and that Falun Gong should have its registration under the Societies Ordinance revoked.

These calls were followed by public comments made by the secretary for security, Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye, that her department would keep a close eye on the sect and that her office had received complaints from the public about being inundated with handbills and e-mails from the group. In addition, Executive Councilor Nellie Fong Wong Kut-man said that the Hong Kong government should accelerate the process to enact a subversion law to regulate the activities of Falun Gong in the Special Administrative Region (SAR).

These views have been reinforced by statements issued by the Office of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Hong Kong that have sought to thwart any "foreign" attempts to investigate the situation, such as efforts by an envoy of the Dutch government to meet with local Falun Gong members. As a result, the Dutch government cancelled the visit because it "doesn't believe that [the] schedule [of their officials] should be changed under pressure from the Chinese government."

"It must be pointed out," said a spokesperson in Hong Kong for the office of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, "that Hong Kong SAR affairs are the internal matters of China."

These comments in Hong Kong, moreover, have been reinforced by remarks made by government officials in Beijing that the central government had confidence in the ability of the Hong Kong government to curb the local activities of Falun Gong.

In this atmosphere, an attack was made on two women in Hong Kong who are Falun Gong members as they distributed handbills about the sect, and there was a report that a local Falun Gong member was fired because of her involvement in the movement.

Joint Statement

We are 12 local Christian organizations that want to express our deep concern about the current Falun Gong controversy in Hong Kong which has created serious tension between our community and Beijing and has caused a negative impact upon continuing the practice and protection of Hong Kong's human rights, freedom and rule of law.

We are particularly concerned about the recent anti-Falun Gong campaign in Hong Kong and public speeches made by officials of the Central Government Liaison Office and those of some government and political leaders in the SAR. All of these statements tighten the pressure on the SAR government to suppress or ban the Falun Gong movement and its activities in Hong Kong. As a result, it produces more division, hostilities and tension between Hong Kong's people and practitioners of Falun Gong.

We do not agree with the views that have been expressed that the protest of local and overseas Falun Gong members outside of the Central Government Liaison Office was an act of interference in China's internal affairs nor do we agree with those who advocate that the SAR government should draft legislation to enact Article 23 of the Basic Law to prohibit acts of treason, secession, sedition or subversion against the central government or the theft of state secrets. Some people have even proposed that the SAR government should enact laws to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the SAR. We want to stress that to draft a petition, to hold a peaceful demonstration or to criticize the central government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a right held by everyone in Hong Kong. These are normal activities. We believe that the recent actions of Falun Gong, which have been described as "politicized" and "internationalized" acts, are, in fact, activities that are protected by the laws of Hong Kong, including the Basic Law, which is Hong Kong's mini-Constitution.

Thus, for the SAR government to use the above reasons to suppress Falun Gong and its activities not only affects Falun Gong, but it also suppresses all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other members of civil society who hold and express critical views toward the central and SAR governments.

We, as people of faith, hope that Hong Kong society will accept religious tolerance, allow differences, appreciate diversity and respect people's freedom so that peace and harmony can be sustained. We strongly believe that we should not allow the Falun Gong controversy to instill anger and hostility in the community which in the end might lead to more confrontation, conflicts or even violence.

We urge the Central Government Liaison Office, the SAR government, political leaders and people of influence to stop making speeches that divide and promote animosity toward any of Hong Kong's people and to respect the "one country, two systems" principle and the Basic Law that acknowledges the rights of the people of Hong Kong to freedom of association, of assembly, of procession, of demonstration and the freedom of conscience to practice their religious beliefs.

List of Christian Organizations:

Christians for Hong Kong Society

Church Workers Association

Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs

Hong Kong Catholic Youth companion

Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee

Hong Kong Christian Institute

Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students

Hong Kong Student Christian Movement

Hong Kong Women Christian Council

Justice & Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese

Social Concern Fellowship, Shum Oi Church, Church of Christ in China, Hong Kong

Council (C.C.C.)

St. Bonaventure Church Social Concern Group