

**Written Submission by
The School of Journalism and Communication, CUHK
Regarding the Chater Garden Incident**

1. The School of Journalism and Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong holds that freedom of the press is a foundation of democratic society. It is an important mechanism for different social sectors to communicate and for society continuously to improve itself. The press serves the public by acting as a “watchdog” and performing a surveillance function. This is particularly important in the case of major social disputes involving public interests. Denying the presence of the press in such situations certainly hampers citizens’ right to know and damages Hong Kong’s international image.
2. In fact, if the press is freely allowed to cover the scene of a police action, this would be advantageous to the police. The event would be fully observed and reported by the press. As a result, untrue or unfair accusations against the police would be proved groundless, while the public would know the truth from the news coverage. This would in fact be a win-win situation for all parties, including the police, the press and the public.
3. We also understand that due to special circumstances (such as the preservation of criminal evidence, protection of major political figures) the police cannot allow the press to be present at some scenes. But the police should not impose unnecessary restrictions upon the press just for the sake of convenience. Setting up a designated “press area” should be done only in unusual circumstances. If this is done, the police should have clear internal guidelines and they should have prior discussions with the press about such arrangements.
4. The press, however, should not interfere with police work in their reporting assignments, especially in case of public demonstrations, protests or riots. The press and the police have their own responsibilities and sometimes conflicts and miscommunication may happen. With mutual understanding, both sides must show restraint and cooperate with each other.
5. In the Chater Garden incident, we believe that the police did not have justification for arresting and handcuffing the reporters. It seems that the police took such action simply because the reporters refused to enter the designated press area. This was a totally unacceptable act by the police. The reason given by the police (e.g., “preventing the reporters from hurting themselves”) was unconvincing.

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