

# Nearly Two Million Take to Hong Kong's Streets in Peaceful Anti-Extradition Protest



Protesters stand on Harcourt Road overlooking the Legislative Council during a rally in Hong Kong, in the latest opposition to a planned extradition law that has since morphed into a wider call for democratic rights in the semi-autonomous city, August 18, 2019.

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More than a million people took to the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday in another mass protest against plans to allow extradition to mainland China, organizers said.

Wielding umbrellas against the heavy rain, protesters packed out the city's Victoria Park and spilled out to fill several major highways in the surrounding area, with many marching as far as government headquarters in spite of a police ban, raising the now-familiar chant of "Go Hongkongers!"

Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations were also packed with crowds, according to live video streams, as tens of thousands more people tried to join the rally.

Rally organizers the Civil Human Rights Front said an estimated 1.7 million people turned out. The group also hit out a police decision to ban a full march from the park, saying that many more people were prevented from attending owing to the "unreasonable restrictions" imposed by police.

Group convenor Jimmy Sham said the march was about sending a strong message to the administration of chief executive Carrie Lam that the majority of people in Hong Kong favored peaceful and rational protest as a way to make their views known.

"Today, we wanted to tell Carrie Lam that Hong Kong people can do peaceful, rational and non-violent protest as well as put up a brave resistance," Sham said. "Today was all about the peaceful part, and asking for a response from Lam to our

five demands.”

The anti-extradition protests that have gripped the city since early June are making five key demands of Lam’s administration: the formal withdrawal of planned amendments to laws that would allow extradition of alleged criminal suspects to face trial in Chinese courts; an amnesty for arrested protesters; an end to the description of protesters as rioters; an independent inquiry into police abuse of power; and fully democratic elections.

“Lam has continued to hide behind the police, and to use their violence as a way to suppress the demands of the people of Hong Kong,” Sham said.

He said some protesters had only resorted to violence because Lam’s administration has been ignoring peaceful demonstrations.

## **Civil disobedience**

Cantopop star Denise Ho told the rally that the marchers had only set off from the park to ease the sheer pressure of the crowd.

“The police told us that we couldn’t march, and that we’d have to do something else, and not leave Victoria Park,” Ho said. “But there were just too many people today, so that’s why everyone took to the streets.”

“This kind of civil disobedience has persisted over several months in Hong Kong in spite of the authorities’ attempt to extinguish it using everything they’ve got,” she said. “They tried to make people too scared to come out, but it didn’t work.”

“Hong Kong people are still incredibly united, to the point where they come out even in this heavy downpour,” Ho said.

A protester surnamed Cheung said the two most important demands for her were fully democratic elections to the city’s Legislative Council (LegCo) and for the chief executive.

“I feel that our freedoms are being stripped away and that the police ... won’t even let us come out in protest over that,” Cheung said.

“It’s unreasonable to talk about supporting peaceful methods of protest if things have gotten to the point where we can’t even go on a peaceful march.”

A highschooler surnamed Lok said he hopes that the city's young people will boycott class come September, an idea that was shown to have widespread support in a recent poll of nearly 20,000 students.

"We want our school to respond positively to the five major demands ... as well as committing to provide support for all arrested students," Lok said.

### **Muted police presence**

Police presence was muted for most of the day, with a noticeable absence of riot police, tear gas or rubber bullets, even when protesters spilled out onto Harcourt Road, a key site in the 2014 democracy movement after night fell.

Across the harbor in Kowloon's Mong Kok district, a group of protesters gathered outside the local police station, shouting angry slogans, flashing laser pointers and throwing eggs, but left shortly before a group of riot police showed up to clear some barricades on Nathan Road.

Former 2014 student leader Joshua Wong posted a video to Twitter which showed a group of around 15 people clad in the black clothes that have marked out anti-extradition protesters in recent weeks, filing into a police station at the end of the protests at around midnight on Sunday.

"Lots of undercover officials that dress up & pretend as protesters with black t-shirt," Wong wrote via his Twitter account. "They were spotted by citizens when they went back to the Police Headquarter in the midnight."

The government said some "breaches of the peace" had occurred in spite of the majority of protesters behaving in a peaceful manner.

"A large number of protesters rushed to the roads and occupied the carriageways of Causeway Road and Hennessy Road after leaving the public meeting venue," it said in a statement after the rally.

Protesters also blocked roads in Western and Central districts, Admiralty, Wanchai, Causeway Bay, and Tin Hau.

In response to public anger over police violence, the statement said that the police had exercised restraint, tolerance, and patience.

“Only when there were violent acts or illegal behaviors which endangered the safety of people at the scene, police would stop them by proportionate use of force,” saying the public was being “unfair” to the police force.

***Reported by Lau Siu-fung for RFA’s Cantonese Service, and by Wang Yun for the Mandarin Service. Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.***

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