



19 August 2019

Mr Anthony Bellanger
General Secretary
International Federation of Journalists

Dear Mr Bellanger

Thank you for your letter of 23 July 2019 to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

Freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of association are guaranteed rights and freedoms under our Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitutional document. For many years, Hong Kong has been a regional media hub, with a vibrant and very robust local media scene and a large presence of international media. The freedom of the press is very much alive and well in Hong Kong and media act entirely independently in producing their reports. If you require proof, look no further than the thousands of pages and hundreds of hours of TV coverage on the current protests in Hong Kong.

As a matter of principle and law, HKSAR Government rejects and deplores the use of violence against anyone for any purpose and on any occasion. Police will actively investigate illegal and violent acts to bring offenders to justice. The July 21 incident you mention is being actively investigated by Police, who have so far arrested 27 persons in relation to that matter.

Like other law enforcement agencies throughout the world, the Hong Kong Police Force's main responsibility is to maintain law and order. Police respect the freedom of the press and the rights of the media to report on public events and incidents, which recently have included large protest marches, rampant vandalism of public and private property, and violent attacks on Police carrying out their lawful duties. Police will, as far as practicably possible, deploy members of the Force Media Liaison Cadre to facilitate media reporting on the understanding that it does not compromise

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the effectiveness of Police operations. Police also appeal to media workers to be mindful of their own personal safety when covering public events and large-scale demonstrations. As such, media workers should proactively avoid standing between Police and protesters (i.e. “zero distance”) when an operation to disperse an unlawful assembly or violent protest is underway. The Police have explained these basic principles to the media on many occasions and remain open to further dialogue with media workers and representative groups to foster professional relations and a deeper understanding of both sides’ work.

In relation to the dissemination of information, the HKSAR Government has long-established mechanisms and a proven track record of facilitating media work and providing information to the media and members of the public. In 2018, the Government handled more than 760 000 media enquiries (about 2 000 a day), issued more than 320 000 press releases in English and Chinese, and arranged media facilities for more than 8 980 briefings, interviews, visits and public functions. The Information Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force both operate 24-hour media enquiry services. We do not know of any other government in the world that provides such a service around-the-clock, 365 days a year.

We understand that recent blanket coverage of protests and civil unrest in Hong Kong may have created some negative perceptions or misconceptions about general safety in Hong Kong. The fact is, though, Hong Kong remains one of the world’s safest large cities as well as a vibrant economy underpinned by the rule of law and an independent judiciary. We fully understand the vital importance of the free and unfettered flow of information, and a free and open media environment, to Hong Kong’s success past, present and future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maggie Wong', written in a cursive style.

(Ms Maggie Wong)

Private Secretary to Chief Executive