

A new advocacy organization focused on Hong Kong was launched this month at a reception hosted in Speaker's House, House of Commons in the UK Parliament.

The new organisation, **Hong Kong Watch**, is a London-based human rights organisation which speakers described as a human rights 'watchman' and a 'whistleblower' which will speak up if freedom and rule of law are undermined in Hong Kong.

The event was introduced by the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP. His remarks were followed by speeches from Benedict Rogers, Chairman of Trustees at Hong Kong Watch, and the patrons of Hong Kong Watch: former Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind QC, former Labour Shadow Foreign Minister Catherine West MP, Former Leader of the Liberal Democrats Lord Paddy Ashdown, independent cross-bench peer Lord David Alton, and Sir Geoffrey Nice QC who was the chief prosecutor in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic.

Whistleblower and watchdog

Drawing on the words of Lord Ashdown and Lord Alton, Benedict Rogers described Hong Kong Watch as a 'whistleblower' and a 'watchman':

"I think we have two brilliant descriptions of Hong Kong Watch with Lord Ashdown's description of Hong Kong Watch as a 'whistleblower', and Lord Alton's description of Hong Kong Watch as a 'watchman'. We will endeavour to do both."

Benedict Rogers quoted Lord Ashdown, describing Hong Kong Watch as a 'whistleblower': "What will Hong Kong Watch do? Lord Ashdown on a recent visit to Hong Kong said Hong Kong Watch will be a whistleblower, and that is exactly what we will do. We want to build our advocacy on research, on monitoring the situation, drawing on first-hand information, and then we will provide briefings, and seminars: spotlighting the situation. I think one of the reasons for setting up Hong Kong Watch is a sense that there is a lack of awareness about the situation. We want to address this in parliament and policy makers, and further afield."

Lord Alton said:

"We have got to be watchmen now, and use the freedoms and liberties we enjoy in this very

privileged place to speak up on behalf of the people of Hong Kong. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: ‘not to speak is to speak, and not to act is to act’.”

Lord Ashdown underlined that Hong Kong Watch was designed to be a whistleblower which monitored the actions of both the Chinese government and the government of the United Kingdom.

He said:

“The role of Hong Kong Watch goes two ways. Yes, it is our job to blow the whistle on Beijing when we perceive the Chinese government to have broken the terms of the Joint-Declaration, but it is also our job to say to our own government that: ‘you should stand up and argue our case a little more strongly than you have done so far...’”

Threats to rule of law and rights

Speakers underlined the motivation behind the launch of Hong Kong Watch, raising concerns about the ongoing threat to rule of law and the rights protected in the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the Basic Law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Benedict Rogers delivered a message of support from the former Governor of Hong Kong, Lord Chris Patten, who said:

“Hong Kong was of course guaranteed local autonomy and the continuation of its way of life in the Joint Declaration under the International Treaty between Britain and China which lasts until 2047. It is important that China holds to its obligations under the Joint Declaration. Not only is this important for Hong Kong itself, but it will also be taken as a sign by many countries around the world about how much they can trust China to keep its word as the next few years unfold. It is not external interference if friends or supporters of Hong Kong take a fair, informed and balanced view of the community's development. It is simply a mark of continuing friendship for a great city.”

Speakers focused on various areas of concern. Sir Geoffrey Nice QC highlighted that ‘the right to take part in the government of one’s country’ through universal suffrage is an inalienable and universal duty, protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Catherine West MP highlighted the importance of academic freedom, while Sir Malcolm Rifkind highlighted the significance of rule of law.

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