

Dozens of Hong Kong residents fleeing a crackdown on public dissent and peaceful protest under a draconian national security law imposed on the city by Beijing since July 1, 2020 have applied for political asylum in Canada, with 14 applications already successful, an Alberta-based voluntary group has said.

The New Hong Kong Cultural Club Canada (NHKCC) said Canada had become the first country in the world to grant asylum to people fleeing arrest for their part in the 2019 protest movement.

"Since 2019, the NHKCC has assisted over 40 HK freedom fighters who went into exile," the group said in a statement on its Facebook and Twitter accounts.

"Nearly 30 of them in the group have received claimant status which means they are pending approval ... with full medical, welfare and work or study permits during the wait," it said.

"There are 14 of them who have successfully been granted [status] as Canadian political refugees and will be able to apply for permanent residency right away," the group said.

It said more than 100 potential applicants were still waiting to get to Canada, after being hampered by quarantine restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic.

The only way out

One of the group's founders, who gave only a nickname Bruce, said anyone in the pro-democracy, or "yellow," camp in Hong Kong is vulnerable to political persecution under the current crackdown.

"They are charging peaceful and non-confrontational lawmakers under the national security law, so the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is only going to step up its oppression of Hong Kong," Bruce told RFA.

"When you are in a place where there is no rule of law and you want to leave, [political asylum] is the only way out if you are young and have no money to emigrate with," he said.

"[Such people] are very vulnerable to political persecution in Hong Kong right now, [but] this problem was created by the communist-backed regime in Hong Kong, not by these young people," Bruce said. "It is not reasonable to expect young people to put up with all of this."

Police checks at the airport

Anyone trying to leave still has to get past police checks that are now ubiquitous at the airport, he said.

"They are specifically stopping and checking young people going to certain countries, even just for tourism," Bruce said. "They would rather keep this group of people in Hong Kong where they

can deal with them."

"[Rather that than] have too many go abroad and keep exposing the behavior of the regime, which is embarassing for the regime," he said.

The group also said Ottawa would also be announcing details of a Youth Talent Scheme "as a lifeboat for fleeing young Hongkongers" soon.

The group's statement comes after Canadian immigration minister Marco Mendicino said in November 2020 that Canada would facilitate working visas and relax immigration criteria, offering a potential pathway to permanent residence to people fleeing the crackdown in Hong Kong.

US sanctions on officials

On Jan. 15, the United States designated six PRC and Hong Kong officials for sanctions in connection with the arrest of more than 50 pro-democracy politicians and activists under the National Security Law.

"We condemn PRC actions that erode Hong Kong's freedoms and democratic processes and will continue to use all tools at our disposable to hold those responsible to account," said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The State Department designated You Quan, vice chairman of the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macau Affairs; Sun Wenqing AKA Sun Qingye, deputy director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong; and Tam Yiu-Chung, a Hong Kong delegate to

the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

National Security Division of the Hong Kong Police Frederic Choi Chin-Pang, Kelvin Kong Hok Lai, and Andrew Kan Kai Yan were targeted for "coercing, arresting, detaining, or imprisoning individuals under the authority of, or in developing, adopting, or implementing, the NSL."

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