



## International Christian Peace Movement

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### Statement from Pax Christi Australia

#### **It is time to support the people of Hong Kong in their hour of need**

The courageous people of Hong Kong are showing us what it means to be engaged in the struggle for freedom, democracy and human dignity. Yet, our government, always eager to advertise its credentials as upholders of these values, has been shamefully silent and inactive.

Over the last two months millions of people have thronged the streets of Hong Kong to express their deep concern that the liberties they still enjoy will be steadily curtailed by Beijing. Such a prospect is unacceptable to them, as it is to us.

After weeks of determined protest, which shows no sign of abating, the police forces have become increasingly heavy handed. Over the weekend we have seen persistent use of tear gas, pepper spray, a growing number of arrests, increasing restrictions on rallies, stern warnings by the authorities, and now ominous threats by the Chinese Government.

The question we need to ask is simple: Is this a prelude to the brutal use of force reminiscent of the tragic events at Tiananmen Square in June 1989? Pax Christi believes the time has come for the world and for Australia to respond before it is too late.

With such large protests, it is always possible that a few hotheads will resort to unfortunate conduct. But the Chinese authorities would be well advised to concentrate less on these relatively minor misdemeanours, and focus instead on the legitimate demands of the peaceful citizens of Hong Kong. Their demands are simple but profound:

- the complete withdrawal of the extradition bill;
- waiving charges against those arrested;
- an end to descriptions of protests as "rioting";
- an independent inquiry into the unrest;
- and the resumption of political reforms.

It is high time for Australia to call on China to act without further delay and give effect to Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, which says that both the leader and the Legislative Council, should be elected in a democratic way. The failure to act in line with this promise is the core of the problem to which China and the international community must give immediate and sustained attention.

The Morrison Government should, together with other governments, use all available diplomatic levers to impress on China the need for dialogue and respect for human rights. The situation should as a matter of urgency be brought before the UN Human Rights Council, and, if need be, before the UN Security Council.

*Pax Christi is a Christian worldwide movement for peace and disarmament.  
It regards justice and human rights as central to peacebuilding  
and fosters the spiritual dimension of peacemaking.*

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In this there is much that the wider community can and should do. Universities, Christian churches and other faith groups, trade unions, professional associations, community organisations, and the media all have an important role to play. Pax Christi calls on them to disseminate information about the situation, to speak out in public, and to communicate their concern to the Chinese Embassy in Canberra as well as to the Australian government

There will be no point lamenting after the event. It will be of no use for our Government to point the finger at China's misdeeds when it is all too late. And the outcome could be even bleaker if the United States and its faithful ally Australia were to use China's repressive policies at home as hypocritical justification for expanding the US and Australian military presence in the South China Sea and the Asia Pacific region more generally. If our concern is defence of human rights and peaceful relations in the region, the time to act is now!

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