

Foreign Secretary statement to Parliament on Hong Kong

I would like to update the House on the situation in Hong Kong.

Mr Speaker, as all members will know, Hong Kong's historic success was built on its autonomy, its freedoms and the remarkable resourcefulness and determination of its people.

We have long admired their prosperity and their values, respected through China's own expression of the 'One Country, Two Systems' approach. An approach that China itself has long articulated and affirmed as the basis for its relations with Hong Kong.

The UK, through successive governments, has consistently respected and supported that model, as reflected both in China's Basic Law and also the Joint Declaration. Which is, as honourable members will know, the treaty agreed by the UK and China and registered with the United Nations, as part of the arrangements for the handover of Hong Kong that were made back in 1984.

So Mr Speaker, set against this Chinese framework and the historic context, on 22 May during a meeting of the National People's Congress, China considered a proposal for a national security law for Hong Kong.

Then on 28 May, the National People's Congress adopted this decision.

China's Foreign Minister, State Councillor Wang Yi, made clear that this legislation will seek to ban "treason, secession, sedition and subversion" and we expect it to be published in full shortly.

This proposed national security law undermines the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework that I have described, under which Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy with executive, legislative and independent judicial powers.

Mr Speaker, to be very clear and specific about this, the imposition of national security legislation on Hong Kong by the government in Beijing, rather than through Hong Kong's own institutions, lies in direct conflict with Article 23 of China's own Basic Law.

And it lies in direct conflict with China's international obligations freely assumed under the Joint Declaration.

The Basic Law is clear that there are only a limited number of areas in which Beijing can impose laws directly, such as for the purposes of defence and foreign affairs, or in exceptional circumstances in which the National People's Congress declares a state of war or a state of emergency.

So the proposed national security law, as it has been described, raises the prospect, in terms of the substance and the detail, of prosecution in Hong

Kong for political crimes, which would undermine the existing commitments to protect the rights and the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, as set out in the Joint Declaration, but also as reflecting International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

And, finally, the proposals also include provision for the authorities in Hong Kong to report back to Beijing on progress in pursuing national security education of its people. A truly sobering prospect.

Mr Speaker, we have not yet seen the detailed, published text of the legislation.

But I can tell the House, that if legislation in these terms, is imposed by China on Hong Kong, it would violate China's own Basic Law.

It would up end China's 'One Country, Two Systems' paradigm.

And it would be a clear violation of China's international obligations, including those made specifically to the United Kingdom under the Joint Declaration.

Let me also be clear about the approach the United Kingdom intends to take.

We don't oppose Hong Kong passing its own national security law.

We do strongly oppose such an authoritarian law being imposed by China in breach of international law.

Mr Speaker, we are not seeking to intervene in China's internal affairs,

Only to hold China to its international commitments, just as China expects of the United Kingdom.

We don't seek to prevent China's rise.

Far from it, we welcome China as a leading member of the international community, and we look to engage with China on everything from trade to climate change.

And it is precisely because we recognise China's role in the world that we expect it to live up to the international obligations, and international responsibilities, that come with it.

So, Mr Speaker, on Thursday, working very closely with our partners in Australia, Canada and the United States, the UK released a joint statement expressing our deep concerns over this proposed new security legislation.

Our partners in New Zealand and Japan have issued similar statements.

And the EU has too, and I have had discussions with a various number of our EU partners.

So the UK stands firm with our international partners in our expectation that China live up to its international obligations under the Sino-British Joint

Declaration.

Mr Speaker, there is time for China to re-consider, there is a moment for China to step back from the brink and respect Hong Kong's autonomy and respect China's own international obligations.

We urge the Government of China to work with the people of Hong Kong, with the Hong Kong Government, to end the recent violence and to resolve the underlying tensions based on political dialogue.

But if China continues down this current path, if it enacts this national security law, we will consider what further response we make, working with those international partners and others.

Mr Speaker, I hope the whole House agrees that we, as the United Kingdom, have historic responsibilities, a duty I would say, to the people of Hong Kong.

So, I can tell the House now that if China enacts this law we will change the arrangements for British National Overseas passport-holders in Hong Kong.

The House will recall that BNO status was conferred on British Dependent Territories Citizens connected with Hong Kong as part of the package of arrangements that accompanied the Joint Declaration in 1984, in preparation for the handover of the territory.

And under that status, currently, BNO passport holders are already entitled to UK consular assistance in third countries.

And the British government also provides people with BN(0) passports visa-free entry into the UK for up to six months as visitors.

Mr Speaker, if China follows through with its proposed legislation, we will put in place new arrangements to allow BNOs to come to the UK without the current 6 month limit, enabling them to live and apply to study and work for extendable periods of 12 months, thereby also providing a pathway to citizenship.

Mr Speaker, let me just finish by saying that even at this stage I sincerely hope China will reconsider its approach.

But if not, the UK will not just look the other way when it comes to the people of Hong Kong.

We will stand by them, we will live up to our responsibilities.

And I commend this statement to the House.