

Dear Vice-Chancellor/President Stuart Croft and President Ben Newsham,

We are a group of Hong Kong students who aims to raise international awareness of the injustices and suppression in the city. We are writing to address concerns and allegations with regards to the Lennon Wall incident on 6th November.

Background

In the span of five months, millions of people took to the streets in protest of the recently-withdrawn Extradition Bill. Yet, Hong Kong's citizens right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression have since been and continued to be threatened, while the police abuse of power remains unmonitored.

While the enactment of the mask ban continues, police officers are, in contrast, no longer required to display their ID or any physical or official identification, leaving no remedy for the victims of police misconduct. This raises concerns towards the anonymous nature of the movement - while we have to remain faceless for our own safety, the police can also manipulate anonymity to commit abuses of power.

It is worth noting that the movement in Hong Kong has often been misconceived as attempts at gaining independence from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and promoting separationism. This characterisation is simply untrue - the people of Hong Kong are fighting for five demands:

1. Withdrawing the Extradition Bill (which has now been fulfilled);
2. Establishing an Independent Commission of Inquiry into police misconduct and brutality;
3. Dropping charges against the arrested protestors;
4. Retracting the classification of protests as "riots";
5. Implementing genuine universal suffrage and democracy.

Ultimately, we are fighting to uphold the promise of "One Country, Two Systems" as outlined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration, recently endorsed by former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and current Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. Hong Kong citizens are resisting because the high degree of autonomy promised under Chinese rule has been continuously eroded.

The ongoing movement in Hong Kong is not merely a political struggle but an example of a humanitarian crisis. Protestors are not merely fighting against their very own oppression, but defending the causes of human rights and freedom from oppression for the rest of the world.

In order to raise international awareness, we made an application to the University of Warwick on 10th October to set up a Lennon Wall. The University did not respond until 3rd November. In addition, our request for the wall to be set up for a month was rejected;

instead, we were given eight hours on 6th November from 9am to 5pm, “due to the popularity of the Piazza”.

We suggested alternative proposals but the University showed no intention to negotiate. While we understand the potential criticism towards permitting the prolonged campaign of one party, we believe that any academic institution which encourages critical thinking and intellectualism should encourage people to speak up and voice their opinions - one of the major functions of the Lennon Wall.

Clarification regarding the pig

On the said time and day of the event, we made a collage of post-its forming a mosaic pig wearing a yellow helmet, for the purpose of attracting attention and constructing a symbol of the Hong Kong protestors, and pay homage to them. This pig is the mascot for LIHKG, a Reddit-esque forum used by many Hong Kong people. Variations of the pig is also seen on many Lennon Walls in Hong Kong.

However, it was taken down by the campus security following complaints from mainland Chinese students that the pig is allegedly racist. They believe that the pig means “Zhi-Na pig”, which was how the Japanese army used to name and humiliate Chinese people during the Second World War.

It is simply unreasonable for us to put up a symbol that is offensive to our very own race, given that people living in Hong Kong are Chinese. Hong Kong was also a part of China that was then being invaded. Nonetheless, the head of the campus security ordered the removal without giving us a chance to appeal nor explain. Neither did they try to investigate the legitimacy of such complaints before making the decision.

Such a decision following the one-sided complaint has inspired within us concern regarding how the significance of our group is inferior to those who complained. As such, we would like to seek a clear clarification from the university on the rationale behind their decision.

We have also seen accusations regarding the content posted on the Lennon Wall and our Instagram account as “racist, discriminatory and misleading”. We deny all these groundless allegations and urge for concrete evidence and examples to be provided before any allegation is laid. We are deeply disappointed and strongly oppose the attempt of the opposite party to smear us with such slanderous language.

Conclusion

This incident is in fact a great illustration of how the freedom of expression on campus can be jeopardised by the mere existence of a dissenting party. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has emphasised that “protecting freedom of expression is a legal requirement for most higher education providers”.

Quoting Martin Niemöller: "When the Nazis came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist. When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent; I was not a social democrat. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I wasn't a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out."

We therefore urge the University of Warwick and the Students' Union to stand for human rights and democracy.

This group does not represent the welfare of the Hong Kong student community, but voices out the yearn for liberty and human rights amongst Hongkongers here. We may not be democratically elected, but we still possess the freedom of speech endowed and protected by the laws here in the UK. We do not wish the corrosion of human rights to happen here at Warwick, as it is in Hong Kong. For more information about our cause and actions, please refer to our website <https://www.warwickstandswithhk.com/>. We can also be reached via Instagram or Twitter @Warwick4hk.

Yours sincerely,

A group of staunch Warwick students from Hong Kong