12 August 2019

Mr Christophe Deloire
Secretary-General
Reporters Sans Frontieres

Dear Mr Deloire,

Thank you for your letter of 25 July 2019 to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

Freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of association are guaranteed rights and freedoms under our Basic Law, Hong Kong’s constitutional document. For many years, Hong Kong has been a regional media hub, with a vibrant and very robust local media scene and a large presence of international media – print, digital, TV and radio. The freedom of the press is very much alive and well in Hong Kong and media act entirely independently in producing their reports. If you require proof, look no further than the thousands of pages and hundreds of hours of TV coverage on the current protests in Hong Kong.

As a matter of principle and law, HKSAR Government rejects and deplores the use of violence against anyone for any purpose and on any occasion. Police will actively investigate illegal and violent acts to bring offenders to justice.

In relation to the “extradition” Bill, it has been suspended indefinitely and the Chief Executive of HKSAR has already said that it is “dead”. It will lapse when the current-term Legislative Council disbands in July 2020. It is not correct to say the Bill was a threat to journalists and their sources. The crimes covered by the extradition Bill were only those of a most serious nature carrying a minimum jail term of seven years (e.g. murder, rape, arson, kidnapping etc). They do not relate to freedom of speech, publication or the press which are fully protected by the Basic
Law and Hong Kong law. Thus, there is no basis whatsoever to fear detention or prosecution for journalistic work. Indeed, one of the major principles of the extradition Bill was the “double criminality” principle which means that any alleged offence subject to an extradition request needs to be a criminal offence of the same seriousness in both jurisdictions. Reporters in Hong Kong do not face charges or get jailed for writing stories, filing TV reports or taking photographs.

Like other law enforcement agencies throughout the world, the Hong Kong Police Force’s main responsibility is to maintain law and order. Police respect the freedom of the press and the rights of the media to report on public events and incidents, which recently have included large protest marches, rampant vandalism of public and private property, and violent attacks on Police carrying out their lawful duties. Police will, as far as practicably possible, deploy members of the Force Media Liaison Cadre to facilitate media reporting on the understanding that it does not compromise the effectiveness of Police operations. Police also appeal to media workers to be mindful of their own personal safety when covering public events and large-scale demonstrations. As such, media workers should proactively avoid standing between Police and protesters (i.e. “zero distance”) when an operation to disperse an unlawful assembly or violent protest is underway. The Police have explained these basic principles to the media on many occasions and remain open to further dialogue with media workers and representative groups to foster professional relations and a deeper understanding of both sides’ work.

In terms of transparency on public affairs, HKSAR Government has long-established mechanisms and a proven track record of facilitating media work and providing information to the media and members of the public. The Government leadership, policy bureau and executive departments respond to a multitude of media enquiries on a daily basis. In 2018, the Government handled more than 760,000 media enquiries (about 2,000 a day), issued more than 320,000 press releases in English and Chinese, and arranged media facilities for more than 8,980 briefings, interviews, visits and public functions. The Information Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force both operate 24-hour media enquiry services. We do not know of any other government in the world that provides such a service around-the-clock, 365 days a year. All of the Government leadership, all policy bureaux and most departments have
media teams staffed by professional Information Officers to assist the media with their enquiries and work. Since the international media’s needs and interests may be different to those of local media, a dedicated team of Information Officers handles requests for information and interviews from overseas correspondents whether stationed in Hong Kong or visiting.

We understand that recent blanket coverage of protests and civil unrest in Hong Kong may have created some negative perceptions or misconceptions about general safety in Hong Kong. The fact is, though, Hong Kong remains one of the world’s safest large cities as well as a vibrant economy underpinned by the rule of law and an independent judiciary. We fully understand the vital importance of the free and unfettered flow of information, and a free and open media environment, to Hong Kong’s success past, present and future.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

(Ms Maggie Wong)
Private Secretary to Chief Executive