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CHINA

Jimmy Lai found 'guilty': a predictable outcome in Hong Kong's sham trial

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“Guilty”. As widely expected. The three judges of the Hong Kong Court found Jimmy Lai, the Catholic entrepreneur and publisher who has been imprisoned since 2020 for defending freedom and truth, guilty on all three counts. Two of these relate to alleged

conspiracy and collusion with foreign forces under the National Security Law imposed by the Chinese government on Hong Kong in 2020 to crack down on the pro-democracy movement. The third relates to publishing seditious material in his newspaper, *Apple Daily*, which the authorities shut down by force in 2021.

The two conspiracy charges carry a life sentence, but even a limited prison term would likely result in Jimmy Lai's death, given his age (he turned 78 on 8 December) and serious health issues, including diabetes and high blood pressure, which are rapidly worsening due to his prison conditions. Another trial will now begin to determine his actual sentence, with the first hearing set for 12 January 2026. Defence lawyers said that Jimmy has not yet decided whether to appeal against the guilty verdict.

M "Made for Truth" award **on 25 October** (accepted by his son Sebastien), listened motionless to the verdict and to Judge Esther Toh, who accused him of harbouring "resentment and hatred" towards China. Also present in the packed courtroom were his wife Teresa, her son Augustin and Cardinal Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, who is himself a symbol of the struggle for freedom in Hong Kong and the Church. He is also a close friend of Jimmy Lai and received him into the Catholic Church in 1997 (*in the LaPresse photo, their arrival together at court)*. A large crowd also gathered outside the court to await the verdict, demonstrating the local population's support for the man widely regarded as the symbol of the battle for democracy in Hong Kong.

He is judged as such by the Chinese regime, as evidenced by the initial reactions to the verdict. The Hong Kong-based Chinese National Security Office issued a statement labelling Lai “pawn of external anti-China forces” who attempted a “colour revolution” in the city. 'We strongly condemn the political manipulation of Hong Kong by a small number of Western politicians and anti-China media under the guise of 'human rights' and 'freedom', openly exonerating Jimmy Lai'.

In the face of international protests over the three-year-long trial, the Chinese Foreign Ministry strongly condemned countries "smearing" Hong Kong's judicial system, urging respect for China's sovereignty. It should be noted that, in the 1997 treaty with the United Kingdom for the return of the former British colony, China itself had guaranteed Hong Kong autonomy for 50 years under the “one country, two systems” slogan. This promise was immediately broken, however, as evidenced by the National Security Law, resulting in the arrest and trial of Jimmy Lai and other Hong Kong democrats.

It is precisely Hong Kong's judicial system that has been systematically subverted, as showed in the press release issued by Caoilfhionn Gallagher, lead counsel of the international legal team defending Jimmy Lai: “Today’s verdict - she said - is a stain on a once enviable Hong Kong legal system. A brave, brilliant 78-year-old man has been convicted in this vindictive and grossly unfair verdict, condemned for nothing more than being a successful publisher and journalist and a dedicated peaceful pro-democracy campaigner. After five long years of imprisonment which violates international law, it is time to end this sham process and release Mr Lai. If China fails to release him immediately and unconditionally, the international community must hold China to account.”

This is a "sham conviction" and "a disgraceful act of persecution" commented Beh Lih Yi, Asia-Pacific director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, regarding today's verdict. 'The ruling underscores Hong Kong’s utter contempt for press freedom,' she said. “Jimmy Lai’s only crime is running a newspaper and defending democracy.”

S[illegible]eave in London, released a statement: “Today is a dark day for anyone who believes in truth, freedom and justice. My family and I are saddened but not surprised by the guilty verdict in my father's case. We have always known that my father was being prosecuted solely for his courageous journalism and unwavering commitment to democracy. Today's conviction is the culmination of years of persecution at the hands of the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities. It is an attack on the values we all hold dear. It is now up to the UK Government to stand up for those values by securing my father's release, before it is too late."

Another of Jimmy Lai's daughters, Claire, also issued a statement, referring in particular to her father's precarious health: “Having spent the last few years in Hong Kong, I have personally witnessed my father’s rapidly failing health. He is 78 and has spent five years in terrible conditions, and we are worried about how much more he can bear. This verdict proves that the authorities still fear our father, even in his weakened state, for what he represents. We stand by his innocence and condemn this miscarriage of justice. We hope the United States will continue to exert pressure for my father to be returned to our family so that he can recover in peace.”

.The references to the United Kingdom and the United States are not coincidental. In fact, the case also has a major international impact.. The British Foreign Office swiftly condemned the '"politically-motivated prosecution"' of Jimmy Lai. Notably, US President Donald Trump stated in October that he had raised the issue of

Jimmy Lai's case during his summit with Xi Jinping, urging his release.

During Sebastien Lai's visit to Italy for the Giornata della Bussola (Daily Compass Conference Day), the Italian government also called for Jimmy Lai's release in a statement by the Foreign Minister's special envoy for the promotion of religious freedom, Davide Dionisi, who personally met with the son of the Hong Kong entrepreneur.