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United States Senate

October 8, 2019

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The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 25000

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to express my deep concern that on June 18, 2019 you explicitly told Chinese President Xi Jinping that you would remain silent on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, even as the world feared another brutal crackdown by mainland China. You have now repeatedly undercut America's efforts to press Beijing on violations of political freedoms and human rights.

According to a CNN report, you promised President Xi that you would not speak out on protests in Hong Kong while trade talks continued.¹ In doing so, you gave the leader of the Chinese Communist Party your tacit approval for continued coercion and dehumanization of protestors. Even worse, you made this commitment on the same call in which you reportedly discussed your domestic political rivals with the leader of China. Thus, President Xi may plausibly have concluded that aiding your campaign efforts would increase his freedom of action in Hong Kong.

Your conduct on the June 18 call is especially concerning in light of your other actions and statements related to China's repression in Hong Kong and beyond.

- On August 1, 2019, you referred to Hong Kong pro-democracy protests as "riots" and said of efforts to stop the demonstrations: "that's between Hong Kong and that's between China. Hong Kong is a part of China, they'll have to deal with that themselves."² As you may know, one of the protestors' demands is that Hong Kong authorities retract their characterization of protests as "riots."

¹ Jim Sciutto, Gloria Berger and Jeremy Diamond, *Trump promised Xi US silence on Hong Kong democracy protests as trade talks stalled*, CNN (Oct. 4, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/04/politics/trump-xi-hong-kong-protests/index.html>.

² Sarah Zheng and Jun Mai, *US President Donald Trump calls protests 'riots' and an issue between Hong Kong and Beijing*, South China Morning Post (Aug. 2, 2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3021067/chinas-top-diplomat-yang-jiechi-accuses-us-fanning-fires>.

- In June 2019 and again in early July 2019, your administration reportedly told Kurt Tong, then-U.S. general counsel in Hong Kong, to cancel speaking engagements for fear of Beijing’s reaction to candid remarks by a U.S. government official.³
- Since May 2019, news reports have suggested that your administration is delaying the imposition of targeted sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for large-scale human rights violations against the Uighurs and other Central Asian minorities in Xinjiang because these actions could jeopardize trade talks with Beijing.⁴ On June 27, 2019, I led six of my Senate colleagues in writing to you to seek answers on this issue and to express our belief that failure to address China’s egregious human rights violations weakens American moral leadership and sends a signal to authoritarians around the world that they can operate with impunity. I have yet to receive a satisfactory response.

I urge you to change course. The future of freedom in Hong Kong is uncertain. A more forceful defense of universal rights and values, coupled with actions that impose costs on those committing abuses, can alter the calculus of would-be repressors.

In light of my escalating concerns, I request written responses to the following questions and requests by October 29, 2019:

- 1) On your June 18, 2019 call with President Xi, did you promise, suggest, or otherwise indicate to him that you would refrain from commenting on matters related to the protests in Hong Kong?
- 2) Please provide a full, unedited transcript of your June 18, 2019 call with President Xi, including any records related to the call that White House staff stored inappropriately in highly secured systems.
- 3) Please provide full, unedited transcripts of any additional calls with President Xi since June 1, 2019.
- 4) Since June 1, 2019, have you provided any other assurances to President Xi regarding U.S. policy with respect to Hong Kong?
- 5) In your September 24, 2019 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, you stated: “Freedom and democracy must be constantly guarded and protected, both abroad and from within.” How are your assurances to the leader of the Chinese Communist Party regarding your intention to ignore repression in Hong Kong consistent with the imperative to guard freedom and democracy?

³ Jim Sciutto, Gloria Borger and Jeremy Diamond, *Trump promised Xi US silence on Hong Kong democracy protests as trade talks stalled*, CNN (Oct. 4, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/04/politics/trump-xi-hong-kong-protests/index.html>.

⁴ Alan Rappeport and Edward Wong, *In Push for Trade Deal, Trump Administration Shelves Sanctions Over China’s Crackdown on Uighurs*, New York Times (May 4, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/world/asia/trump-china-uighurs-trade-deal.html>.

- 6) On August 1, 2019, to justify your view that China can stop the protests in a manner of its choosing, you stated that “Hong Kong is a part of China.” Do you believe that Hong Kong should retain its autonomy consistent with the principle of “one country, two systems?”
- 7) Are you aware of any communication from anyone in your administration to a Chinese government official suggesting, implicitly or explicitly, that the policy of the United States with respect to Hong Kong is contingent on investigations of U.S. persons carried out by Chinese authorities?
- 8) Going forward, what is your approach for communicating with President Xi regarding China’s policies with respect to Hong Kong?
- 9) On which concerns related to human rights and democracy will you be pressing President Xi while trade talks continue?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator