Hong Kong activist detained attempting to seek asylum at US consulate

October 27, 2020

By Helen Davidson

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/27/hong-kong-activist-detained-while-attempting-to-seek-asylum-at-us-consulate>

Tony Chung, a 19-year-old [Hong Kong](https://www.theguardian.com/world/hong-kong) activist on bail after his arrest on suspected national security offences, has been detained by authorities while attempting to seek asylum at the US consulate.

Two other members of Chung’s now-disbanded activism group, Yanni Ho and William Chan, were also arrested later on Tuesday.

According to the UK-based group Friends of Hong Kong, Chung had gone to the US consulate in Hong Kong at 8.10am on Tuesday but it did not open for another 20 minutes. He called the organisation from a coffee shop less than 50 metres from the consulate, and said he had been followed by a man in a green shirt who he feared was a national security agent.

“About four minutes later we received reports from a passerby that Tony was snatched away from Pacific Coffee and led towards [a nearby government] building,” the spokesman said.

Local media, citing police sources, said he was being held at a central station. The South [China](https://www.theguardian.com/world/china) Morning Post reported it witnessed Chung being led away from the coffee shop, flanked by two men.

Hours later, the Facebook page for Studentlocalism, a pro-independence group of which Chung was formerly the convenor, said Ho and Chan had also been arrested and taken to police stations.

Hong Kong police confirmed the arrests late on Tuesday, saying two men and one woman aged between 17 and 21 had been detained for investigation on suspicion of publishing content inciting independence, in violation of the national security law.

On the eve of the national security law’s introduction, Studentlocalism announced the group was disbanding, before moving its base offshore. Its Facebook page has continued to post updates.

In July, [Chung, Chan and Ho were among four student activists arrested](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/29/dispirited-but-defiant-hong-kongs-spirit-of-resistance-endures) under the Beijing-imposed national security law, for allegedly advocating online for an independent Hong Kong. Chung’s passport was confiscated and he was released on bail.

The Friends of Hong Kong spokesman said Chung had been told to report on Monday to police on Tuesday. He feared he would face further charges and have his bail revoked, prompting him to seek asylum at the US consulate.

The US [does not grant asylum to people at its diplomatic postings](https://pl.usembassy.gov/visas/politica-asylum-and-refugees/) – asylum seekers must be physically present on US soil. However, there are more complicated processes to apply for refugee status, of which the Hong Kong consulate is a processing post, according to state department websites.

The spokesman said they had previously petitioned the US state department on behalf of Chung, but after the activist was told to report to the police station he decided he could not wait for a response.

“He feared for his life and asked if he could enter the US consulate to seek asylum,” he said.

The national security law was imposed on the previously autonomous region in late June, bypassing Hong Kong’s legislature but with the blessing of its government. The law criminalises acts of subversion, secession, foreign collusion and terrorism, and has been criticised as so broadly defined as to infringe upon basic human rights of free speech and assembly, and [breach international law](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/04/hong-kong-security-law-may-break-international-laws-china-human-rights-un).

At least 27 people so far [have been arrested under the law](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/sep/29/the-hong-kong-arrested), amid a Hong Kong-wide crackdown on dissent, the pro-democracy movement and people advocating for independence.

Chung is also awaiting trial over another case where he stands accused of desecrating the national flag. Last month, he told the Guardian he was unable to travel or enrol in studies while he waited for both cases to be resolved.

“Being in prison is surely not as dreadful as the wait,” he said. “I am awaiting my fate like a prisoner. Everything feels so different in Hong Kong now. It’s unimaginable that we have political prisoners in this international metropolis. And we don’t know what is going to happen next.”

The US consulate has been contacted for comment.