Critics cry foul as Joshua Wong and other young Hong Kong democracy leaders get jail

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A Hong Kong appeals court jailed three leaders of the Chinese-ruled city's democracy movement for six to eight months on Thursday, dealing a blow to the youth-led push for universal suffrage and prompting accusations of political interference.

Joshua Wong, 20, Alex Chow, 26, and Nathan Law, 24, were sentenced last year to non-jail terms including community service for unlawful assembly, but the Department of Justice in the former British colony applied for a review, seeking imprisonment.

Wong was jailed for six months, Chow for seven months and Law for eight months. Law had been the city's youngest ever democratically elected legislator before he was stripped last month of his seat by a government-led lawsuit.

The three appeared stern but calm as their sentences were delivered by a panel of three judges. A lawyer involved in the case, Jonathan Man, said they would appeal.

The jail terms disqualify them from running for the financial hub's legislature for the next five years.

The bespectacled Wong, who was 17 when he became the face of the student-led democracy movement, punched his fist in the air as he left the court room and shouted: "Hong Kong people don't give up."

Minutes earlier he Tweeted: "They can silence protests, remove us from the legislature and lock us up. But they will not win the hearts and minds of Hongkongers."

Chow waved at his parents as he left the court. His mother broke down in tears.

About 100 supporters later swarmed the prison vans taking the three away from court, shouting "shame on political prosecution" and waving yellow umbrellas, a symbol of the city's pro-democracy movement, a Reuters witness said. At least one person was taken away by police.

The three judges in Hong Kong's second highest court, the court of appeal, wrote in their judgment that the three could not say they were jailed for exercising freedom of assembly in a city where many democrats see a gradual erosion of freedoms promised in 1997 when Britain handed the territory back to China.

"In recent years, there's been an unhealthy trend in Hong Kong society. Some people use the pursuit of ideals ... as an excuse to take illegal action," Judge Wally Yeung wrote.

"This case is a prime example of the aforementioned unhealthy trend."