



香港記者協會
HONG KONG JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

Press Release

Press Freedom Deteriorates in Hong Kong

According to a recent Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) survey, both the public and journalists believe that press freedom deteriorated in 2014. The Hong Kong Press Freedom Index declined 0.6 points to 48.8 for the general public and a more significant 3.1 points to 38.9 for journalists. The index ranges from 0 to 100, which is the highest point for press freedom. HKJA chairperson Sham Yee-lan described the result as worrying.

Journalist respondents pointed out that they were facing difficulties in obtaining information they need for reporting and government manipulation of the media in reporting news had become very common. The HKJA urges the government to take steps to protect freedom of speech, including enacting a freedom of information law as soon as possible to ensure the people's right to access information.

The HKJA released its first Hong Kong Press Freedom Index last year. It is compiled through a scientific research method designed by a group of academics. There are two groups of target respondents. The first is the general public. A total of 1,035 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong residents aged 18 and above were interviewed between January 15 and 20, 2015. The second involved the distribution by the HKJA of questionnaires to journalists between January 12 and 26, 2015. A total of 537 completed questionnaires were returned.

There were a number of violent acts towards journalists and cases of self-censorship over the past year, contributing to a general impression that press freedom had deteriorated. A total of 51% of public respondents believed that press freedom had worsened, 35% believed there had been no change. The figures for journalist respondents were more worrying. A total of 90% believed that press freedom had worsened and 48% thought it had suffered a substantial setback. Just 1% believed that press freedom had improved in the past year.

The difference between general public and journalist perceptions also appeared in other areas surveyed. The results showed that journalist respondents were more dissatisfied than the general public with press freedom. With 0 being very dissatisfied and 10 being very

satisfied, the average rate for the general public was 6.0, while for journalists it was 4.4, which is classified as a relatively low level. Further, journalists believed that self-censorship in the Hong Kong news media was more common, compared with the general public. With 10 being very common and 0 being not at all common, the average rate for journalists was 7.0 while it was 5.6 for the general public. Further, both journalists and the general public believed that the news media had the greatest worries about criticising the central government in Beijing, followed by business tycoons and the Hong Kong government.

On violence against journalists, both the general public and journalist respondents believed that incidents involving extralegal intimidation or physical violence when reporting were tend to be common. With 10 being very common and 0 being not at all common, the average rate for the general public was 5.2 and for journalists 5.5. Further, 90% of journalists believed the number of attacks on colleagues by law enforcement officers had increased compared to a year earlier. The figures for journalist views on whether attacks by participants at public events organised by the pro-establishment camp had increased was 87%, by interviewees who were dissatisfied with reporters' questions was 70% and by participants at public events organised by the pan-democrat camp was 21%.

The survey also revealed that the general public and journalists both believed that the effectiveness of the watchdog role played by the Hong Kong media had decreased. The average rate for the general public and journalists both decreased from 6.6 in 2013 (with 10 being very effective) to 6.3 in the latest survey. There was also a perception that the diversity of viewpoints in the media had decreased. The average rate for journalists went down from 5.3 in 2013 to 4.6 in the latest survey (with 10 being very much diversified). The average rate for the public decreased from 6.0 to 5.9.

There was no improvement on whether existing laws were sufficient to allow journalists to obtain the information they needed for reporting. With 10 being very adequate and 0 being very inadequate, the average rate for the public was 5.8 and for journalists 4.6. Further, the general public rated the difficulties facing the news media in obtaining information needed for reporting at 5.4, while journalists rated it at 6.0 (with 10 being very common).

On the attitude of Hong Kong government officials, including the chief executive, to media inquiries, the rating for journalist respondents declined from 3.1 in 2013 to 2.6 in the recent survey, with 10 meaning that officials were very truthful and 0 meaning they absolutely avoided inquiries. A total of 83% of the journalist interviewees gave rates of 4

or below, and 71% agreed that the Hong Kong government was one of the sources of press freedom suppression. Only 6% disagreed.

Press freedom is gradually declining in Hong Kong. To counter this, there is a clear need for freedom of information legislation to ensure the public and journalists have a right to access information held by the government and public bodies. The survey reveals that most journalists (89%) believe that the Hong Kong government should enact such a law. HKJA chairperson Sham Yee-lan pointed out that if the Hong Kong government really respects press freedom, such legislation is an absolute necessity. She also urged people to fight together with the HKJA to defend press freedom and other core values cherished by Hong Kong people.

The HKJA would like to express its sincere appreciation for the generous help of members of the survey consultant group, who are as follows:

- Ms. Mak Yin Ting (Former Chairperson, HKJA)
- Ms. Zoe Hung (Convenor of Press Freedom Sub-committee, HKJA)
- Dr. Clement So (Professor, School of Journalism & Communication, CUHK)
- Prof. Lisa Leung (Associate Professor, Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University)
- Mr. Wong Tin Chi (Senior Lecturer, Department of Journalism, School of Communication, HKBU)
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- Dr. Robert Chung (Director, Public Opinion Programme, HKU)

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The Press Freedom Index Report can be downloaded from our website (www.hkja.org.hk).
If there are further enquiries, please call us on 2591 0692.

Hong Kong Journalists Association
27 March 2015