



Hong Kong: Political Unrest and Citizenship Offers Debate on 24 October 2019

On 24 October 2019, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) that “this House takes note of the recent political unrest in Hong Kong, and of the calls to offer residents of Hong Kong citizenship in another country”.

Summary

In March 2019, protests broke out across Hong Kong in response to a proposed extradition law between Hong Kong and China. The law was withdrawn in early September. As reported by the *New York Times* in October 2019, the protests have continued, with protestors calling for the introduction of direct elections for all lawmakers and amnesty for arrested participants, amongst other demands.

The protests have increasingly escalated since September, according to the *Guardian*. The police have reportedly started using live ammunition on protestors, injuring at least two. Protestors are said to have used Molotov cocktails, bricks and rocks to attack the police. On 1 October, the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, released a statement which called for “restraint and de-escalation from both protestors and the Hong Kong authorities”.

The UK transferred sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997. At this time, Hong Kong residents could apply for British national (overseas) (BNO) status. This status gave residents a British passport and access to British consular support. It did not give them the right to live or work in the UK, nor would they be recognised by the EU as British citizens.

There have recently been calls for the UK Government to extend full citizenship rights to Hong Kong residents with BNO status. For example, the *Guardian* reported in August that Tom Tugendhat MP, chair of the Foreign Affairs committee, had called on the Government to grant “Hong Kong citizens full UK nationality as a means of reassurance amid the current standoff with Beijing”.

There have also been suggestions that Commonwealth countries could provide a second citizenship to Hong Kong residents. In response to a written question on 3 September 2019 about this idea, the Government said, “it is for individual countries to decide their own policy on citizenship issues”. With regards to the UK position, on 8 October 2019, the Government stated that holders of the BNO passport did not have the right of abode in the UK, and that “there are no plans to change the law in this respect”.

Sally Dray | 18 October 2019

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Further Information

- Daniel Victor and Mike Ives, '[What's Happening With the Hong Kong Protests?](#)' *New York Times*, 15 October 2019

Article from the New York Times detailing the current state of the protests in Hong Kong as well as some background to the unrest.

- Emma Graham-Harrison, Lily Kuo and Verna Yu, '[A Battle for the Soul of the City: Why Violence Has Spiralled in the Hong Kong Protests](#)', *Guardian*, 6 October 2019

Article from the Guardian with further information on the recent violence of the protests.

- House of Commons Library, 'Background: the UK and Hong Kong' and 'British National (Overseas) Passport Holders', in [Hong Kong in 2019](#), 16 September 2019, pp 4, 15–6

Sections from the House of Commons Library briefing on Hong Kong detailing the relationship between the UK and Hong Kong and information on the British national (overseas) passport.

- [Urgent Question on 'Hong Kong'](#), *HC Hansard*, 26 September 2019, cols 863–75

Hansard transcript from urgent questions in the House of Commons to the Foreign Secretary on Hong Kong.

- Sophia Yan, '[Over a Hundred MPs Call on Commonwealth Countries to Offer Citizenship to Hong Kongers](#)', *Telegraph*, 10 September 2019.

Article from the Telegraph reporting that MPs wrote to the Foreign Secretary asking for full British rights to be extended to people in Hong Kong.

Parliamentary Debate, Statements and Questions

- [Private Notice Question on 'Hong Kong: Emergency Powers'](#), *HL Hansard*, 7 October 2019, cols 1903–6
- A selection of written questions from both Houses: [HL17663](#) (8 October 2019); [292079](#) (7 October 2019); [291321](#) (4 October 2019); [HL17561](#) (1 October 2019); [HL17560](#) (1 October 2019)

Press Articles and Comment

- BBC News, '[Hong Kong's Carrie Lam Abandons Speech After Protests](#)', 16 October 2019
- Alice Woodhouse, '[UK Risks Being Pulled into Hong Kong Crisis Over Citizenship Row](#)', *Financial Times*, 1 September 2019
- Peter Walker, '[UK Should Give British Nationality To Hong Kong Citizens, Tugendhat Says](#)', *Guardian*, 13 August 2019