

**#FREE
JIMMYLAI**



**Press Release
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“The total destruction of the Hong Kong legal system”: Jimmy Lai sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment

Today, Monday 9th February 2026, Jimmy Lai was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment following his conviction on 15th December 2025 of sedition and two charges of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces under the controversial National Security Law (“NSL”) by a Hong Kong court.

At 78 years old and in rapidly declining health, Mr Lai, a British citizen and prisoner of conscience who has already endured over five years’ imprisonment in solitary confinement, faces spending his final years in prison.

This draconian sentence is a punishment for nothing more than Mr Lai’s public interest journalism and peaceful pro-democracy campaigning. As the 855-page judgment convicting him in December 2025 made clear, Mr Lai was convicted for his work as editor and publisher of the popular, pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* and his advocacy for democracy and the rule of law in Hong Kong. His son, Sebastien Lai, described the day of the verdict as *“a dark day for anyone who believes in truth, freedom and justice.”* Today is another dark day for justice.

Responding to his father’s sentence, **Sebastien Lai** said, *“Sentencing my father to this draconian prison sentence is devastating for our family and life-threatening for my father. It signifies the total destruction of the Hong Kong legal system and the end of justice. After more than five years of relentlessly persecuting my father, it is time for China to do the right thing and release him before it is too late.”*

Mr Lai’s daughter, **Claire Lai**, said, *“This is a heartbreakingly cruel sentence. Over the last five years, I have watched my father’s health deteriorate dramatically and the*

conditions he's kept in go from bad to worse. If this sentence is carried out, he will die a martyr behind bars."

Lead counsel of the international legal team, **Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC**, added, *"Today marks the final blow to the rule of law in Hong Kong. Sentencing Jimmy Lai – already aged 78 – to two decades behind bars is an affront to justice, and the culmination of over five years of malicious lawfare against a courageous, elderly British citizen and prisoner of conscience. Now that this sham trial is finally over, we call on leaders from around the world to speak with one voice in their demand for China to free Jimmy Lai so he can come home to his family in London at last."*

Jimmy Lai's prosecution and conviction have been condemned by multiple countries worldwide, including the UK and US Governments, [all G7 nations](#), the [European Union](#), and [24 countries in the Media Freedom Coalition](#).

The **UK Government** has criticised the "[politically motivated prosecution](#)" of Mr Lai and has called for his immediate release on multiple occasions. On return from his visit to Beijing in January 2026, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer MP confirmed that he had raised Mr Lai's case robustly with President Xi.

The **US Government** has repeatedly called for Mr Lai's immediate and unconditional release. President Donald Trump has confirmed he has raised Mr Lai's case in bilateral meetings with President Xi of China, and has consistently expressed his support for Mr Lai, both [whilst campaigning](#) and [in office](#).

Last year, the **UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention** [ruled](#) that Mr Lai is unlawfully and arbitrarily detained, and called for his immediate release, and five UN Special Rapporteurs have also [called](#) for Mr Lai's immediate and unconditional release.

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Notes to editors:

1. Jimmy Lai has been in prison in Hong Kong continuously since December 2020. He is currently held in Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre, where he has been imprisoned for the duration of his National Security Law trial. He was previously imprisoned in Stanley Prison.
2. Mr Lai's trial under Hong Kong's NSL commenced on 18 December 2023. Closing arguments were in August 2025. The trial has lasted 156 days, and Mr Lai was on the witness box for 52 days.

3. Mr Lai is a British citizen (he holds a full British passport and no other passport). His family and his businesses have close ties to the USA, Canada, France, and Japan.
4. Mr Lai faced two charges of conspiracy under Article 29 of the NSL ('Collusion with a Foreign Country or with External Elements to Endanger National Security') and one charge of sedition. The prosecution alleged:
 - In Count 1 (the sedition charge) that Mr Lai conspired to make 161 seditious publications, mostly newspaper articles published in Lai's newspaper *Apple Daily*.
 - In Count 2 (under the NSL) that Mr Lai engaged in substantially the same conspiracy as in Count 1, with the object of requesting a foreign country or an institution, organisation or individual to impose sanctions or blockade, or engage in other hostile activities against the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region or the People's Republic of China.
 - In Count 3 (under the NSL) that Mr Lai conspired with certain other individuals to request foreign countries to impose sanctions or blockade, or engage in other hostile activities against the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region or the People's Republic of China.
5. The court stated, in passing the 20-year sentence, that 18 years of the sentence will be served consecutively with a separate case heard at the District Court (a fraud conviction, which has been widely condemned, including by multiple Governments and UN experts).
6. Mr Lai has a right of appeal to the Hong Kong Court of Appeal and then to the Court of Final Appeal.

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