

## Critics cry foul as 'Umbrella movement' leaders jailed

Written by Taipei Times

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Joshua Wong, leader of Hong Kong's "Umbrella movement," looks on as he addresses the media before his sentencing outside the High Court in Hong Kong yesterday.

**Photo: AFP**

A Hong Kong appeals court yesterday jailed three leaders of the territory's pro-democracy "Umbrella movement" for six to eight months, dealing a blow to the youth-led push for universal suffrage and prompting accusations of political interference.

The jail terms are to curtail the political ambitions of the trio, disqualifying them from running for seats in the territory's legislature for the next five years.

Joshua Wong (黃之鋒), 20, Alex Chow (周永康), 26, and Nathan Law (羅冠聰), 24, were sentenced last year to non-jail terms, including community service for unlawful assembly, but the Hong Kong Department of Justice applied for a review, seeking imprisonment.

Wong was jailed for six months, Chow for seven months and Law for eight months.

Law had been Hong Kong's youngest-ever democratically elected legislator before he was stripped last month of his seat by a government-led lawsuit.

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 courtroom and shouted: "Hong Kong people don't give up."

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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.

The three judges in Hong Kong's second-highest court, the Court of Appeal, wrote in their judgement that the three could not say they were sentenced for exercising freedom of assembly in a territory where many democrats see a gradual erosion of freedoms promised in 1997.

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

The former British colony, which has been governed under a "one country, two systems" formula since it was returned to Chinese rule in 1997, was rocked by nearly three months of mostly peaceful street occupations in late 2014, demanding Beijing grant the territory full democracy.

The "Umbrella movement" was triggered by Wong and his colleagues storming into a courtyard fronting the territory's government headquarters.

They were later charged with participating in and inciting an unlawful assembly.

Just before sentencing, Wong told more than 100 supporters who thronged into the court lobby, some weeping, that he had no regrets.

"I hope Hong Kong people won't give up," he said. "Victory is ours. When we are released next

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year I hope we can see a Hong Kong that is full of hope. I want to see Hong Kong people not giving up. This is my last wish before I go to jail.”

The Department of Justice said in an earlier statement there was “absolutely no basis to imply any political motive.”

Critics disagreed.

“From the initial choice to prosecute these young democrats through today’s hearing, these cases have been shot through by politics, not law,” Human Rights Watch China director Sophie Richardson said in a statement. “That Hong Kong’s courts increasingly appear to operate as mainland courts do is clear evidence that ‘one country, two systems’ is on the ropes — with ominous consequences for all.”

Amnesty International also slammed the jail terms.

“The relentless and vindictive pursuit of student leaders using vague charges smacks of political payback by the authorities,” Amnesty International Hong Kong director Mabel Au (歐陽) said.

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