



**Statement by The Law Society of Hong Kong
in Response to Concerns regarding the Sentence of
“Lai Chee Ying Case” HCCC 51/2022**

1. The Law Society of Hong Kong notes the widespread community concerns regarding the sentence handed down on 9 February 2026 in the “Lai Chee Ying Case” HCCC 51/2022. As a statutory self-regulatory professional body responsible for upholding the integrity of the legal profession and the proper administration of justice, The Law Society of Hong Kong addresses these concerns from a strictly legal perspective.
2. Safeguarding national security is an essential attribute of any sovereign nation and a fundamental pillar underpinning social stability, economic prosperity, and the effective functioning of the rule of law. As stated in the Reasons for Verdict of the “Lai Chee Ying Case”, laws protecting national security are not unique to Hong Kong; they exist in all major common law jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Singapore. These jurisdictions, in appropriate cases, can impose sentences up to life imprisonment for serious national security and public safety offences.
3. The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“NSL”), enacted pursuant to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China and implemented through Annex III of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (the “Basic Law”), reflects the essential duty of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”) to safeguard national security while continuing to respect and protect human rights, including freedoms of speech, press, publication, association, assembly and demonstration, as guaranteed under the Basic Law and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ICESCR”) as applied to Hong Kong.
4. The “Lai Chee Ying Case” was tried strictly in accordance with Hong Kong’s established criminal procedures and rules of evidence. The 156-day trial was conducted in open court before a panel of three judges pursuant to Article 46 of the NSL. Fourteen witnesses as well as Mr. Lai Chee-ying (“Mr. Lai”) himself, gave evidence. Members of the public and the media were permitted to attend the proceedings without undue restriction. All parties had legal representation throughout the proceedings. An 855-page Reasons for Verdict was handed down on 15 December 2025. The mitigation hearing took place from 12 to 13 January 2026.

5. This is the first case in which defendants have been tried and convicted of the collusion offence under Article 29 of the NSL. Under Article 29, a person who commits an offence of a grave nature shall be sentenced to life imprisonment or fixed-term imprisonment of not less than ten years. On 9 February 2026, Mr. Lai was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.
6. A defendant retains the full right to challenge the outcome of a criminal trial through the established appeal mechanisms. Any party who wishes to appeal, whether on matters of law, procedure, or evidence, may do so by filing a notice of appeal or an application for leave to appeal within the statutory time limits. These safeguards ensure that any alleged errors are addressed by the appellate courts in accordance with Hong Kong's legal framework.
7. The Basic Law safeguards independence and impartiality of the Courts and the right to a fair trial. Article 2 of the Basic Law guarantees independent judicial power, including the power of final adjudication, in accordance with the Basic Law; Article 19 further provides that Hong Kong shall be vested with independent judicial power; and Article 85 stipulates that the courts shall exercise judicial power independently, free from any interference.
8. The constitutional duty of judges and judicial officers is to apply the law. Article 84 of the Basic Law provides that judges and judicial officers shall adjudicate cases in accordance with the law. The Judicial Oath requires all judges and judicial officers to safeguard the law and administer justice without fear or favour. No one is above the law, and the law applies equally to all.
9. The Hong Kong Bill of Rights ("BOR") Ordinance (Cap. 383) gives effect in local law to the provisions of the ICCPR and ICESCR as applied to Hong Kong. While the freedom of opinion and expression is protected under Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 16 of the BOR as set out in the BOR Ordinance, the relevant right is not absolute, and may be restricted in law.
10. As emphasised by the Chief Justice at the Ceremonial Opening of Legal Year 2026, meaningful public commentary, local or international, must be grounded in a careful reading of judgments and a proper understanding of the legal principles applied. Informed discourse strengthens the community's appreciation of the rule of law and the proper administration of justice.
11. According to the Rule of Law Index 2025 released by the World Justice Project on 28 October 2025, Hong Kong ranks 24th among 143 countries and jurisdictions globally, and ranks 9th globally in respect of "Absence of Corruption", reflecting the enduring and wide international recognition of its legal system.
12. The Law Society of Hong Kong encourages all members of the community to carefully review and fully understand the contents of both the Reasons for Verdict and Reasons for Sentence.

13. The Law Society of Hong Kong reiterates its unwavering trust and confidence in the legal system of Hong Kong, the independence of the judiciary and the integrity and professionalism of its judges.

The Law Society of Hong Kong
9 February 2026