

U.S. bill on HK sparks backlash

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A controversial bill that the U.S. House of Representatives passed on Tuesday to support the Hong Kong protests has elicited a strong reaction.

The bill, the "Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act", would require an annual review of the city's political developments to justify the region's special trading status under U.S. law.

The legislation also paves the way for sanctions against individuals deemed responsible for actions to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy. The bill awaits a vote in the Senate. If passed, it needs the U.S. president's signature to become law.

"The legislation will do nothing to help resolve the situation in Hong Kong. In fact, it could actually escalate an already volatile situation by encouraging additional acts of violence," Jon R. Taylor, chair of the department of political science and geography at the University of Texas-San Antonio, told China Daily.

"Like the trade war, tariffs, and visa denials, the U.S. legislation's consequences will likely be economic and cultural — with fewer opportunities for U.S. investments and less American tourists," he said.

Taylor said a stable Hong Kong serves everyone's interests, and the U.S. should be concerned that the increasing acts of violence will only lead to greater chaos.

Also passed on Tuesday was the Protect Hong Kong Act, which would halt the export to Hong Kong of crowd-control devices such as tear gas and rubber bullets. The bill is intended to prevent police in Hong Kong from using anti-riot equipment on protesters.

"The U.S. House of Representatives is disregarding and distorting facts by referring to serious criminal offenses such as arson, smashing of shops and violence against police officers as an issue of human rights and democracy," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Tuesday after the passage of the act.

"It fully exposes the shocking hypocrisy of some in the U.S. on human rights and democracy and their malicious intention to undermine Hong Kong's prosperity and stability to contain China's development," he said.

"It's blatant interference in the internal affairs of another country," said Mike Wong, vice-president of the San Francisco chapter of Veterans for Peace, a global organization whose mission is building a culture of peace.

"This is unacceptable. We oppose any interference by the elected U.S. lawmakers to spend U.S. tax dollars to support the illegal protesting in Hong Kong," he said.

Wong's organization is leading a petition calling on U.S. lawmakers to stop interference in Hong Kong and pay attention to domestic problems such as homelessness, inadequate health care, housing crisis and gun violence.

"I don't think this bill will be good for Hong Kong. It would hurt Hong Kong economically and politically. It's just another stunt by the U.S.," said Wong.

The bill would give the U.S. the power to dictate to Hong Kong what laws can and cannot be passed or whether it can enforce those laws, he said. "If you just imagine how the U.S. would react if some other country were to try to dictate to a city in the U.S. what law they can or cannot pass, that would be considered completely unacceptable. It's not acceptable in the case of Hong Kong," he said.

Wong said the economic damage from the prolonged rioting is huge and has set Hong Kong back many years. "Instead of urging calm and peace, the U.S. lawmakers are promoting dissension and indirectly encouraging illegal protest and violence," he said.

"The riots have greatly surpassed the bottom line of peaceful expression of political demands. It has negatively affected Hong Kong's societal order, as well as disturbed people's lives and their work," said Liu Qing, president of the Southern California chapter of China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification.

"The four months of riots and violence in Hong Kong is definitely not about human rights issues. I personally believe there's nothing wrong with Hong Kong's treatment of human rights. There's no country in the world where you could express your political demands illegally," he said.

According to the Human Freedom Index published by the Washington-based Cato Institute in 2018, Hong Kong is the No. 3 jurisdiction after New Zealand and Switzerland, while the U.S. ranked the 17th.

"Hong Kong people enjoy more civil liberty than most countries in the world, including the U.S.," said Julie Tang, a retired judge on the Superior Court of San Francisco.

Calling it "a misguided law", Tang, who was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the U.S. as a teenager, said, "Hong Kong doesn't need any sanctions or interference from the U.S. to promote democracy and freedom. It needs the U.S. to help promote peace and restore law and order for its entire citizenry."