Free China Movement Statement on Jimmy Lai Ahead of the APEC Leaders' Meeting

The Free China Movement calls on President Donald Trump and the leaders gathering for the APEC Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen on November 18–19 to press the authorities in Beijing for the release of Jimmy Lai, Hong Kong's most prominent political prisoner, on humanitarian grounds. The summit is a high-level opening that must not be wasted on expressions of concern alone.

Lai, 78, founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily, has been imprisoned since December 2020. In February 2026, a Hong Kong court sentenced him to 20 years' imprisonment for collusion and sedition in the national-security case. He has spent nearly six years in custody, much of it in conditions his family describes as prolonged solitary confinement. His case is not a footnote to Hong Kong's transformation: the prosecution of the city's most outspoken publisher was the measure by which Beijing demonstrated that no independent voice in Hong Kong would be tolerated, and his continued imprisonment is the measure by which the world is still being tested.

President Trump has spoken about Lai's case with unusual directness. He has said Beijing bears deep "hatred" toward the imprisoned publisher, and, according to a Bloomberg report published on November 12, indicated he is not optimistic that Xi Jinping will free him. The President has also said he raised Lai's case with Xi "at length," and he is expected to meet Xi on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in Shenzhen. That meeting is the moment when words must become an ask: a direct request, leader to leader, for Lai's release.

The human stakes are urgent. Lai's family and his advocates — including his son Sebastien Lai and the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation — report that his health is deteriorating in prolonged solitary confinement and have urged President Trump to press for his release at APEC. These accounts come from his family and advocates; they have not been independently verified, and we present them as such. But the underlying facts need no verification from any second source: a 78-year-old man, imprisoned for six years, sentenced to twenty, held in conditions his family says are breaking his health. No government that claims to value human dignity can treat that as an acceptable price for a man's journalism.

We call specifically on President Trump to raise Jimmy Lai by name with Xi Jinping in Shenzhen and to seek his release on humanitarian grounds, and on the other APEC leaders to join that request rather than leave it to one voice. We call on the authorities in Beijing to release Lai immediately and unconditionally, and to end the use of national security charges to punish journalism and peaceful dissent in Hong Kong. And we call on the United States Congress, the parliaments of America's allies, and the international community to keep Lai's case at the center of every engagement with Beijing until he is free — because a city that jails its publishers has announced what it intends for every other freedom, and silence in Shenzhen would be read in Hong Kong as consent.

Jimmy Lai's imprisonment was meant to silence a newspaper and intimidate a city. The free world answered by remembering his name. At APEC, it must answer by demanding his freedom.

Sources of record: Bloomberg (Nov 12, 2026) reporting on President Trump's remarks; reporting on the expected Trump–Xi meeting at the APEC Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen, Nov 18–19, 2026; adjudicated facts of Lai's February 2026 sentence (20 years, collusion/sedition) and imprisonment since December 2020; family/advocate accounts (Sebastien Lai; Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation) on health and solitary confinement — attributed, not independently verified.