

Public Statement:
Urging the Hong Kong Government to Immediately Release LAI Ke and Stop Persecuting Transgender Individuals

On May 2, 2023, LAI Ke, a Chinese citizen also known as Xiran, embarked on Hong Kong Airlines flight HX239 from Shanghai to Hong Kong, carrying both a Chinese passport and a Canadian visa, with plans to connect to Cathay Pacific flight CX828 bound for Toronto, Canada, the following morning. Communication with LAI Ke ceased around 6:30 a.m. on May 3, 2023, after her last message confirming transit procedures at the Cathay Pacific counter. Concerns arose among family and friends when LAI Ke failed to board the scheduled flight to Toronto, prompting them to report a potential disappearance to the Hong Kong police in early June 2023. Initially, authorities claimed no record of LAI Ke entering Hong Kong, dismissing the concerns. However, on July 18, 2023, over two months later, LAI Ke's parents received notification of her arrest by the Hong Kong police and subsequent detention at Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre. Following this, on July 19, 2023, LAI Ke's parents were formally informed by the Sichuan Public Security Bureau of LAI Ke's arrest by Hong Kong law enforcement in early May. Despite efforts by a lawyer to clarify the situation during a visit to Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre on July 20, 2023, it was revealed that LAI Ke had been convicted of three immigration offences during the period of disappearance and sentenced to 15 months in prison. Throughout this period, from May 3, 2023, when LAI Ke was initially apprehended, until July 18, 2023, LAI Ke repeatedly sought to communicate with family and engage legal representation, all requests were consistently denied.

On December 28, 2023, family and friends were notified by the Correctional Services Department that LAI Ke had exhibited exemplary behaviour during her time in prison and would be granted early release on March 2, 2024. However, to their dismay, in February 2024, merely a month prior to the anticipated release,

another notification arrived, informing them of LAI Ke's impending transfer to the Immigration Department's detention facility in Castle Peak on March 2, 2024, with no explanation provided for the indefinite detention.

LAI Ke and her partner, Cai Xia, both identify as transgender women and are actively involved in advocating for transgender rights and providing support to the transgender community in Shanghai. However, their efforts have been met with severe repression by the authorities. On November 6, 2022, Cai Xia was forcibly taken from her home in Shanghai by the police and has been unlawfully detained ever since. It wasn't until March 2023 that Cai Xia was formally arrested by the Shanghai police. Initially charged with drug abuse and child abduction, the accusations were later changed to involvement in organizing obscene activities. Following an egregiously unfair trial, Cai Xia was sentenced to imprisonment on June 19, 2023. This case unequivocally represents the Chinese government's systematic persecution of gender minority groups. (For more details on Cai Xia's case, please see The Guardian report: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/jan/15/its-difficult-to-survive-chinas-lgbtq-advocates-face-jail-and-forced-confession>). Due to LAI Ke's involvement in the case, she had been harassed and followed up by the Chinese police. She was then intercepted by the Hong Kong law enforcement body while on her way to Canada, illustrating how the Chinese government's suppression and persecution of gender minorities have now extended to Hong Kong, employing every tactic to prevent affected individuals from leaving the country.

Furthermore, when LAI Ke was apprehended and disclosed her transgender identity, she was denied access to hormone medication contained in her luggage. Throughout her detention, LAI Ke repeatedly requested access to hormone medication, only to have these requests denied on various pretexts. As a result, LAI Ke was forced to cease HRT medication for nearly two months, leading to severe physical and psychological repercussions, including instances of self-harm.

Additionally, prison officers insisted that LAI Ke cut her hair. When authorities discovered that LAI Ke had voiced her grievances to her lawyer regarding the prison conditions, she was promptly placed in solitary confinement for a week under the absurd pretext of "alien invasion of Earth." Subsequently, LAI Ke faced intimidation aimed at dissuading her from further complaints. Just a month prior to her scheduled release date, the Hong Kong government abruptly extended her detention indefinitely. This egregious action not only constitutes a flagrant violation of justice but also strongly suggests that LAI Ke's prolonged detention is politically motivated, orchestrated under the directives of the Chinese government.

We, a global coalition of concerned individuals, unite in solemn urging:

1. The Hong Kong government must promptly release LAI Ke.

LAI Ke was denied a fair trial in Hong Kong. The entire process, including interrogation, trial, conviction, and sentencing, occurred in isolation without legal representation, flagrantly violating principles of judicial fairness. Therefore, LAI Ke's conviction must be overturned, and the Hong Kong government must release her without delay.

2. The Chinese government must cease its suppression and persecution of transgender individuals immediately.

Under the guise of maintaining stability, the Chinese government has unjustly targeted transgender individuals. Those within the transgender community in China live in perpetual fear, lacking access to appropriate support and facing the constant threat of arbitrary arrest, detention, and mistreatment. It is imperative that the Chinese government ends its suppression and upholds the legitimate rights of transgender individuals.

3. The Hong Kong government must cease its collaboration in the suppression and persecution of transgender individuals.

LAI Ke's case exposes the complicity of the Hong Kong government in aiding the Chinese government's efforts to suppress transgender individuals abroad and subject them to persecution. Transgender individuals in custody deserve access to proper medical care and the safeguarding of their fundamental human rights. Therefore, the Hong Kong government must immediately halt its involvement in such suppression and demonstrate respect for the legitimate rights of transgender individuals.

LAI Ke (Xiran) Global Concern Group

February 27, 2024