

# Hong Kong student Joshua Wong avoids jail over pro-democracy protest

Wednesday 17 August 2016, by [PHILLIPS Tom](#) (Date first published: 15 August 2016).

**Nineteen-year-old is given 80 hours' community service but has said he will continue to fight for democracy.**

Joshua Wong, the most public face of Hong Kong's umbrella movement demonstrations, has avoided a jail term for his role in a protest that helped launch the unprecedented 79-day political convulsion.

Wong, 19, and fellow activist Alex Chow, who is 25, had been convicted last month of unlawfully entering a fenced off area outside Hong Kong's government headquarters on 26 September 2014.

A third activist, 23-year-old Nathan Law, was convicted of inciting others to take part in the action which happened just before Hong Kong was gripped by almost three months of demonstrations against Beijing's refusal to grant democratic concessions to the territory.

At the time Amnesty International denounced the verdicts as "a chilling warning for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly" in Hong Kong.

On Monday a court in the former British colony stopped short of handing down jail terms to the three men.

The eastern magistrate's court ordered Wong and Law to perform 80 and 120 hours of community service respectively, according to the Hong Kong Free Press website. Chow was given a three-week suspended jail sentence.

Speaking before the verdict 19-year-old Wong said his lawyer had told him to "hope for the best and prepare for the worst".

Human Rights Watch called for the sentences to be quashed by Hong Kong's government. "In sentencing these students, Hong Kong authorities' behaviour increasingly resembles that of their counterparts in Beijing," said Sophie Richardson, the group's China director. "Leading peaceful protests is no crime, and the charges against the three should be dropped."

Wong earlier told ABC the activists were prepared to go to prison for their campaigning and would continue to fight for democracy in Hong Kong irrespective of Monday's ruling. "[Since] we are involved in civil disobedience we already expected to pay a serious price," Wong said.

In April, Wong and Law launched a new phase of their bid to wrestle greater freedoms from China's Communist rulers by founding a new political party called Demosisto.

The party's first challenge comes on 4 September when Law plans to stand as a candidate in elections for Hong Kong's legislative council. Law would have been disqualified from the election had he been sentenced to more than three months' imprisonment this week.

In early August, with political tensions in the former colony rising before the vote, Hong Kong witnessed the first pro-independence rally in its history, with thousands of protesters taking to the streets after pro-independence candidates were barred from the election.

Wong told ABC Demosisto was not explicitly advocating independence for Hong Kong but was pushing for self-determination after 2047 when the “one country, two systems” framework under which it has been governed since handover in 1997 expires.

“[We] think independence might be one of the options,” he said.

**Tom Phillips** in Beijing

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**P.S.**

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