

Humanitarian fund helping arrested Hong Kong protesters will halt operations by October 31

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The operators of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund will soon be defunct. *“As long as Hongkongers’ hearts are still here, we need not be sad,”* trustee Cardinal Zen said.

A fund set up to provide financial assistance for protesters arrested during the 2019 pro-democracy demonstrations will be wound up in the coming two months, its trustees announced on Wednesday. The fund will cease operations on October 31.

The 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund’s announcement came after it was informed by directors of the company holding the fund, the Alliance for True Democracy Limited, that it will soon be defunct. The fund had been using the Alliance’s bank accounts to receive donations.

The 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, set up by prominent pro-democracy figures in June 2019, provided thousands of protesters with funds for medical aid, psychological counselling, legal advice and emergency financial relief. It also provided loans for bail money for arrested protesters.

“The fund can no longer have a bank account it can use, and therefore cannot continue to operate,” trustee and former lawmaker Margaret Ng told reporters on Wednesday.

She added that the fund will cease operations *“in as orderly a way as possible to minimise the impact on those who have been seeking the fund’s assistance.”*

Margaret Ng said the Alliance’s bank did not inform the fund as to the reasons why it is ceasing operations, but added that it was *“not surprising”* in the city’s political climate.

Tight timeline

The fund will stop taking on new cases or applications, including for emergency assistance, from Thursday 19 onwards, while August 31 is the last day protesters can make an application for the fund to pay for legal, medical or other services rendered to them before Wednesday 18.

The fund will launch its last round of fundraising to cover the administrative and operational costs of its closing process, which will continue until the end of September. A live donations tracker will be available on the fund’s website.

The winding up process will officially end on October 31, with online donations to end on September 21 and bank donations will cease on September 27. Trustee singer Denise Ho called on the public to take note of the donation deadlines.

The fund is expected to make its last payments on September 28, one day before the Alliance's bank is expected to wind up. *"This is a tight schedule... but the choices available to us are extremely limited,"* Margaret Ng said.

She added that all donor information will also be destroyed when the fund officially closes. The trustee also called on anyone who had taken a bail loan from the fund to repay the sum as soon as possible.

Any leftover funds will be donated to charitable organisations, and a public information and referral hotline will continue to operate after the fund's closing.

Commenting on the fund's closing, Cardinal Zen, another trustee, said he hoped Hongkongers can still find other ways to care and help those who need it: *"As long as Hongkongers' hearts are still here, we need not be sad."*

‘Remarkable achievement’

Margaret Ng, a veteran pro-democracy activist, expressed *"deep regret"* at the fund's abrupt ceasing of operations.

"That the fund has to cease operations before it has fulfilled its mission is a matter of deep regret... but it is already a remarkable achievement for Hong Kong civil society that we have come this far," the barrister said.

Its latest report from July showed a total of HK\$253.7 million in donations since mid-2019, over 90 per cent of which went towards direct financial support for almost 23,000 individuals and services. The fund has assisted over 2,221 legal cases, 1,274 of which are still pending.

The fund was set up days after violent clashes broke out between police and protesters demonstrating outside government offices in Admiralty against a now-withdrawn extradition bill on June 12, 2019.

Its trustees included other prominent pro-democracy figures Cardinal Joseph Zen, scholar Hui Po-Keung, and former lawmaker Cyd Ho, who is currently serving an eight-month prison term over an unauthorised protest in August 2019.

The winding up of the fund comes after calls from Chinese state-backed media in the city for authorities to investigate the fund in recent months for any illegal activity.

It is the latest pro-democracy organisation to crumble in recent weeks, in what critics have decried as **the dismantling of the city's civil society**. Last week, two iconic pro-democracy groups disbanded after pressure from Chinese state media and local authorities – the **Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF)** protest coalition and **teacher's union PTU**.

P.S.

<https://hongkongfp.com/2021/08/18/humanitarian-fund-helping-arrested-hong-kong-protesters-will-halt-operations-by-october-31/>