

The Rt Hon Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer KC
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AB

Paris, 26 January 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Director General of Reporters Without Borders, ahead of your upcoming visit to China, to urge you to use this moment to press, in the strongest possible terms, for the immediate release of publisher Jimmy Lai. This is a matter of urgency, principle, and responsibility towards a British citizen whose life is at serious risk.

You have previously raised Jimmy Lai's case at the highest diplomatic level, and we welcome those efforts. However, your visit to China now presents a critical opportunity to move beyond expressions of concern and to pursue his release. Jimmy Lai has been detained for more than 1,850 days, much of that time in prolonged solitary confinement, because of his journalism and his peaceful pro-democracy views. Following proceedings that fail to meet international standards of fairness, he now faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in prison. His health has deteriorated alarmingly, and his continued detention without adequate medical care places his life in immediate danger. Time is not on Mr Lai's side. Without decisive action, there is a very real risk that he will die in prison for his journalistic work.

The implications extend far beyond Hong Kong. When a journalist of Jimmy Lai's profile can be condemned to die behind bars for his work, it legitimises repression elsewhere and accelerates a global erosion of press freedom that democracies cannot afford to ignore. As Director General of Reporters Without Borders, I must stress that Mr Lai's case is not an isolated injustice. It has become one of the clearest symbols of the systematic dismantling of press freedom in Hong Kong and of the use of national security legislation to criminalise journalism. This conviction does not simply target one individual: it sends a chilling warning to all independent journalists in Hong Kong and far beyond. Make no mistake: in Jimmy Lai's case, press freedom itself is on trial.

Allowing this verdict to stand without consequence would signal that imprisoning journalists for their reporting carries no real cost. It would further embolden authoritarian governments to invoke national security as a pretext to silence independent media and to strip the public of its right to information.

Prime Minister, the United Kingdom has both the standing and the obligation to act. Defending press freedom cannot be an abstract commitment; it must translate into concrete

action when a British citizen is facing life imprisonment for reporting. I urge you to show leadership by using this visit to secure Jimmy Lai's immediate release. The moment to act is now. We again respectfully ask you to demand Mr. Lai's urgent humanitarian release on medical grounds, so that he may reunite with his family in the United Kingdom and receive the care he needs before it is too late.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Bruttin', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Thibaut Bruttin
Director General
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)