

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

9 October 2018 index number: ASA 17/9218/2018

HONG KONG: DENIAL OF VISA FOR FT JOURNALIST A CHILLING MOVE AGAINST PRESS FREEDOM

The Hong Kong government's refusal to renew an employment visa for the *Financial Times*' Asia news editor appears to be an act of political payback that will likely have chilling consequences for press freedom in the city, Amnesty International said.

Victor Mallet also serves as a senior official at the city's Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC). In August, the FCC came under fierce criticism from Hong Kong and mainland Chinese officials for hosting a talk by the pro-independence activist Andy Chan. Although the Hong Kong government has so far resisted calls to disclose the reasons for refusing to renew Mallet's visa, Mallet and the FCC had been urged to cancel Chan's talk on the grounds that discussion of Hong Kong independence poses a threat to China's "national security" and "territorial integrity".

"The refusal to renew Victor Mallet's visa appears to be a delayed act of retaliation by the Hong Kong government. The move has alarming echoes of the retribution foreign journalists who cover politically sensitive issues in mainland China face," said Joyce Chiang, acting Director at Amnesty International Hong Kong.

Authorities in mainland China routinely restrict people's ability to engage in peaceful advocacy and public discussions on grounds of "national security" by using this vaguely and broadly defined concept as a pretence to place unjustified restrictions on the exercise of these freedoms. The government in Hong Kong also seems to be pursuing a broadened concept of "national security".

"The decision is chilling for press freedom and freedom of association in Hong Kong. It is an affront to human rights in this city – rights that the government must protect, promote and respect, not erode."

The FCC regularly hosts talks with individuals from across Hong Kong's political spectrum, including senior government officials. The FCC also organizes the annual Human Rights Press Awards in partnership with Amnesty International Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Journalists Association.

"The FCC is a champion of freedom of expression in Hong Kong and plays an important role in fostering civil discourse in our city. It is deeply shocking that the FCC is now coming under attack in this way," said Joyce Chiang.

Under international standards, journalists and media organizations must not be sanctioned for facilitating discussion of issues that are of genuine public interest and already in the public domain.

In particular, discussions may not be prevented or punished merely because they transmit information issued by an organization that a government has declared as a threat to national security, as is the case with Andy Chan's Hong Kong National Party.