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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

November 9, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
2201 C Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express concerns over the Department's recent public comments on whether the United States invited Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee – who has been sanctioned by the United States since 2020 for his role in implementing Hong Kong's draconian national security law imposed by Beijing – to the leaders meeting of the 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC).

Mr. Lee is claiming publicly that the United States government invited him personally, and the Department of State has not confirmed or denied these claims. Instead, in its public statements, the Department has only said that “participating in APEC 2023 will be in accordance with U.S. law and regulations, including with respect to sanctions.”

Our concerns are two-fold. If the Department did in fact invite Mr. Lee or directed its invitation for Hong Kong to Mr. Lee, that contradicts previous assurances made to Congress that he would not receive an invitation. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee relies on honest and transparent communication with and information from the Department of State to perform its constitutional duties with respect to oversight.

If Mr. Lee was not invited, the Department's lack of repudiation of his claims is disconcerting. The United States should not shield Mr. Lee from the diplomatic and reputational consequences of his role in crushing Hong Kong's autonomy, implementing the national security law, throwing Hong Kongers into prison on spurious charges, and committing other human rights abuses. Shielding Mr. Lee undermines the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions and our policy on Hong Kong as a whole.

We are also concerned that the Department's vague response is meant to avoid a public issue with the People's Republic of China (PRC) immediately before Xi Jinping's meeting with President Biden next week. We sincerely hope this is not the case, as it would demonstrate that the administration is willing to put an economic reset with the PRC ahead of the U.S.' commitment to support the Hong Kong people.

The Honorable Antony Blinken

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We request a response in writing from you on these issues prior to the APEC leaders meeting. Please include a clarification of whether Mr. Lee was invited to APEC, or whether the Department's invitation to Hong Kong was directed to Mr. Lee. In the case that Mr. Lee was not invited, please also inform us as to whether the Department will repudiate his claims to the contrary. If the Department will not do so, please provide a detailed justification as to why.

We appreciate your timely attention and response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of James E. Risch in blue ink.

JAMES E. RISCH  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Handwritten signature of M. T. Romney in blue ink.

MITT ROMNEY  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific,  
and International Cybersecurity Policy