



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## MEAA condemns China's expulsion of Australian journalists

MEAA is outraged at China's expulsion of Australian journalists Bill Birtles of the ABC and Mike Smith of the Australian Financial Review and the arrest and secret detention of Australian journalist and CGTN news anchor Cheng Lei.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said: "The treatment of these Australian journalists, including a midnight police raid on the home of one journalist, is appalling. China's continued intimidation and harassment of foreign journalists, including Australians, represents a dramatic low point for the foreign media's relations with China in almost 50 years.

"The threats made by Chinese authorities, their interrogations, and the ban on leaving the country, forced the two journalists to seek refuge in diplomatic compounds until an agreement could be reached that allowed the pair to urgently return to Australia. The treatment of Cheng, an Australian citizen working for the Chinese state broadcaster, is particularly worrying as she has been detained in secret and little detail of why she was arrested has emerged."

China's attacks on foreign journalists have stepped up in the past two years. In February and March, 14 journalists working for US media were expelled from China, including Australian journalist and Wall Street Journal correspondent Philip Wen. Cheng was detained last week, and Australian journalist and MEAA Member Yang Hengjun was arrested in January 2019 and has been held without trial over allegations of espionage – he strongly vowed to fight the allegations last week.

Strom said: 'It is clear that China, and by extension Hong Kong through the recent National Security Law, is unsafe for foreign journalists. These outrageous attacks on press freedom place any foreign correspondents reporting from China at risk. China is isolating itself from the world's gaze and demonstrating it will not brook any scrutiny of its activities. It threatens and intimidates journalists using 'national security' as a catch-all excuse.

"This is an extremely disappointing development. It has come swiftly, it is extremely aggressive and it will do great harm to China's reputation around the world," Strom said.

**Media contact: Mike Dobbie – ph: 0401 730 195; [mike.dobbie@meaa.org](mailto:mike.dobbie@meaa.org)**