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## Further sanctions on Philippines will harm Hong Kong's future

Hong Kong politicians are still trying without success to reach a satisfactory resolution for survivors and families of the victims of the Manila bus hostage crisis nearly four years ago.

On January 30 the Philippine government said it was "not prepared to consider" apologising for the August 23, 2010 incident, when a sacked policeman took 22 Hong Kong tourists and three Filipinos hostage in Manila. He shot dead seven tourists and their guide before being killed in a bungled rescue.

Why are Hong Kong politicians raising the matter now? Since February 5 this year, the Hong Kong government has suspended the 14-day, visa-free visiting rights of Philippine diplomats and officials; this remains in force until a formal apology is given. But I fear this move marks only the first phase of Hong Kong's sanctions against the Philippines.

Hong Kong has made four demands: three – compensation, punishment of those officials responsible and improved tourist safety – were agreed. But should the fourth, the apology, still be ignored, I foresee Hong Kong halting 14-day visa-free visits of ordinary Philippine passport holders. A third sanction could stop Filipino domestic helpers working here. The final possible sanction would be to stop all Filipinos entering Hong Kong.

Yet these moves could well come at a price. If our politicians impose further sanctions, Hong Kong will suffer. A ban on Filipino helpers will have a negative impact on our economy and the hectic work schedules of many Hong Kong families.

As a lawyer, I know there will be legal consequences if sanctions are expanded.

Should the row worsen – and Filipino helpers are banned – those Hong Kong families affected by the sanctions could apply for a judicial review to challenge the Hong Kong government's decision.

I suspect our politicians are aware of such consequences, but are calling for an apology and placing sanctions on the Philippines to gain political mileage and electoral support.

The public support may help Hong Kong politicians in the short term, but it will be harmful to the SAR in the long run and, even worse, drag mainland China into the row.

Hong Kong politicians may also feel pressured to push for more sanctions if no progress is made.

As a matter of responsibility, these politicians should make decisions that are best for our city, rather than themselves, or as a result of any pressure that is placed upon them.

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