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Life sentences handed to four Hongkongers in Philippines on drug charge

- Group had been found guilty of possession of half a kilogram of methamphetamine near Manila

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The men were arrested at sea in July 2016 near a popular tourist resort in the southeast Asian country.

Lo Wing-fai, Chan Kwok-tung, Kwok Kam-wah and Leung Shu-

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The law would also pave the way for New Zealand companies to manufacture medicinal substances.

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(/news/asia/australasia/article/2177432/new-zealand-embraces-medical-marijuana-new-law-now-campaigners) But the court found them guilty on the possession charge while acquitting them of manufacturing illegal substances.

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Police found 10kg of meth and meth clothing in the suspect's flat. Photo (/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2177303/japanese-tourist-lured-travel-freebies-smuggling-meth-laced)

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The families of the four fled to the Philippines to hear Friday's court ruling. Lo's elder sister, Lo Shu-ho, said she was enraged by the decision.

"It's extremely unfair ... perhaps the court wants to avoid trouble with the government so they handed out life sentences – this is just too horrifying," she said.

Hongkongers arrested in HK\$104 million Philippines crystal meth crackdown
(<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/2165887/five-hongkongers-arrested-hk104-million-philippines>) →

Hong Kong Democratic Party lawmaker James To Kun-sun, who has been helping the families of the four, confirmed the sentences on Friday. He described the convictions as "very unfair".

"My staff are helping them there, and the families are seeking legal advice on a possible appeal," To said.

He urged Beijing and Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor to place priority on the case.

"The central government and the city's chief executive should be concerned about whether the sentences were fair and consistent with the judgment," To said.

"Is the alleged quantity of the drug proportional with the jail terms? We are talking about life imprisonment. Our lawyers are looking into the case and a possible appeal. I still think they are innocent."

The group were detained in July 2016 on board a 50-metre fishing boat about 3km off the coast of Zambales province, northwest of Manila, amid a high-profile operation led by the country's police chief, Ronald dela Rosa.

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Authorities alleged the men were part of a racket moving drugs from the vessel to the mainland, and that equipment used for the production of crystal meth – known as *shabu* in the Philippines – had been seized in the police operation.

But the families claimed it was a set-up. They said officers found nothing in an initial search but later said they had discovered half a kilogram of “Ice” in one of the men’s backpacks, which had been taken out of their sight for a few minutes.

Is there a Hollywood ending to Duterte’s drug war?
(<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2138255/say-hello-my-little-friend-there-hollywood-ending-dutertes-drug>) →

To said the officers had arranged for media organisations to board the vessel to cover the search that day. After they whisked the backpack away, a sniffer dog indicated drugs were inside, he said. The journalists all witnessed it.

“We convinced one of the media outlets to testify and play its footage in court,” the lawmaker said.

He added that he had written to Lam about nine months ago to arrange a meeting on the case, but she only replied by letter, referring him to the city’s Immigration Department.

To flew to the Philippines two years ago to help the men, and referred them to a legal representative through Bernardito Ang, a member of Manila City Council.

Lo Shu-ho told the *Post* via text message from the Philippines: “It seemed like the verdict would be in their favour. I don’t know why they were sentenced to life imprisonment.”

The four were ordered to pay 5 million Philippine pesos (US\$95,000) as a fine.

The high-profile arrests gained widespread coverage in the Philippine media in 2016 and came at a time of tension between the country and China over territorial claims in the South China Sea, as well as a war on drugs in the Philippines that President Rodrigo Duterte has pledged will be “relentless

and sustained”.

South China Morning Post

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