

Action needed now on behalf of detained Canadians in China

by David Tilson

For weeks now, we've watched and waited for the release of two Canadians detained against their will in China. Sadly, there continues to be no indication that such a release will happen anytime in the near future. The resulting diplomatic dispute between Canada and China is worrisome not only with respect to these two Canadians, but also for the thousands of Canadians who can often be in China travelling as tourists, conducting business, and those who are working and living there. Concern is mounting and the Prime Minister must act now to secure the release of the two Canadians and reassure Canadian families with loved ones in China.

A delegation of Canadian parliamentarians, including my Conservative colleague, Michael Cooper (St. Albert-Edmonton), recently travelled to China for bilateral meetings. The trip had been planned before the arrest of Huawei CFO, Meng Wanzhou, in Vancouver and the subsequent detention of the two Canadians in China. The delegation's agenda didn't formally include the detention of the Canadians; however, we, as the Conservative Official Opposition, continue to push for their immediate release.

We've long called on Prime Minister Trudeau to take action on this increasingly contentious situation. Last month, our leader, Andrew Scheer, asked him to pick up the phone, call Chinese President Xi, and demand the safe return of the two Canadians being held by Beijing. However, instead of taking action, the Prime Minister once again demonstrated a profoundly naive approach to diplomacy and tried to downplay the arrests as standard consular cases.

Canadians are rightfully concerned about family members in China and are questioning whether or not it's safe to travel there. They deserve clear answers, as do all Canadians, and the Prime Minister's actions to date have done little to address those concerns. He is willing to call the US President to discuss the arrest of a Chinese citizen in Canada, but he refuses to call the Chinese President to discuss the arbitrary arrest of two Canadian citizens in China. We need more than half measures from him.

Prime Minister Trudeau must prioritize the release of Canadians detained in China. We will continue to urge him to intervene on their behalf and to provide certainty to the hundreds of Canadians with family members working and living in China or those considering travel to that country. This is the strong and decisive leadership Canadians expect and deserve.