

Trudeau condemns Chinese court's 11-year sentence in Canadian's espionage case

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said a Chinese court's sentencing of Canadian businessman Michael Spavor to 11 years in prison for espionage on Wednesday was "absolutely unacceptable" and called for his immediate release.

The United States embassy in Beijing also condemned the sentencing in a statement, saying that proceedings against Spavor and another Canadian charged with espionage were an attempt to "use human beings as bargaining leverage".

The espionage cases are embroiled in a wider diplomatic spat involving Washington and Beijing, and Spavor's sentencing comes as lawyers in Canada representing the chief financial officer of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei (HWT.UL) make a final push to convince a court not to extradite her to the United States.

"China's conviction and sentencing of Michael Spavor is absolutely unacceptable and unjust," said Trudeau in a statement.

"The verdict for Mr. Spavor comes after more than two and a half years of arbitrary detention, a lack of transparency in the legal process, and a trial that did not satisfy even the minimum standards required by international law," he said.

Trudeau called for the release of Spavor, and former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig, who is awaiting a verdict in his espionage case.

China detained both Spavor and Kovrig in late 2018, just days after Canada arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou at Vancouver International Airport on a warrant from the United States.

Canada's ambassador to China, Dominic Barton, who visited Spavor at a detention centre in northeastern China following the verdict, said Spavor had three messages that he asked to be shared with the outside world: "Thank you for all your support", "I am in good spirits," and "I want to get home."



Image source: Newsd.in

“While we disagree with the charges, we realise that this is the next step in the process to bring Michael home and we will continue to support him through this challenging time,” the Spavor family said in a statement.

Noting the presence of diplomats from 25 countries gathered at the Canadian embassy, Barton said that “our collective presence and voice sends a strong signal to China and the Chinese government in particular, that all the eyes of the world are watching.”

The Dandong Intermediate Court also said 50,000 yuan of Spavor’s personal assets will be confiscated. He will be deported on completion of his sentence, Barton said.

The potential sentence ranged from 5 to 20 years.

China detained Spavor in December 2018 and he was charged with espionage in June 2019. The Dandong court concluded a one-day trial in March 2021 and waited till Wednesday to announce the verdict.

Spavor’s family said in March the charges against him are vague and have not been made

public, and that he has had “very limited access and interaction with his retained Chinese defense counsel”.

Kovrig's espionage trial concluded in March with the verdict to be announced at an unspecified date.

Some observers have said convictions of the two Canadians could ultimately facilitate an agreement in which they are released and sent back to Canada.

China has a conviction rate of well over 99%, and public and media access to trials in sensitive cases is typically limited.

Since Meng's arrest, China has sentenced four Canadians to death over drug charges. They are Robert Schellenberg, Fan Wei, Ye Jianhui and Xu Weihong.

China has rejected the suggestion that the cases of the Canadians in China are linked to Meng's case in Canada though Beijing has warned of unspecified consequences unless Meng was released.

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Image source: Reuters

Meng was charged with misleading HSBC Holdings PLC (HSBA.L) about Huawei's business dealings in Iran, potentially causing the bank to violate American economic sanctions against Tehran.

Meng, who has said she is innocent, has been fighting her extradition from under house arrest in Vancouver.

Her extradition hearings in Canada are currently in their last few weeks ahead of a ruling from the judge, expected sometime in the next few months, before Canada's justice minister makes a final decision on whether to extradite her.

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