

The Chinese government's outrage over the arrest and detention of Huawei Technologies Co chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou (孟晚舟) would be easier to hear if it were not so hypocritical.

It is the right and duty of any government to be concerned when one of its citizens is arrested in other country, and to ensure that the individual is provided with consular access and knows their legal rights. However, the broadsides leveled against Canada over Meng's arrest, the claims of "inhumane" treatment and "violation of human rights," are ludicrous, especially from a nation whose government has become synonymous with rights abuses and torture of prisoners.

Chinese media, especially the jingoistic Global Times, have complained about Meng being handcuffed at the airport and having to wear ankle shackles to her bail hearings. They said that treating her as a prisoner was degrading and a violation of her rights since she was not a convicted felon.

They must have forgotten the sight of Peter Humphrey or his wife, who appeared in orange jumpsuits and handcuffs on Chinese television after they were detained in 2013 for conducting due diligence for GlaxoSmithKline and foreign companies.

Some commentaries have gone so far as to describe Meng's arrest as a kidnapping. Perhaps that is because the Chinese media have to write about her arrest in a way that would be familiar to their readers, since Beijing has made abduction of suspects something of a specialty, be they Hong Kong booksellers — including a publisher who mysteriously vanished from Thailand — rights lawyers and dissidents who disappear from their homes and are not heard of for weeks or months, or Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), who went missing after arriving in Guangzhou Province from Macau.

Canada, the articles and officials say, is known for emphasizing human rights, so how can it treat an innocent Chinese woman so barbarically?

That sounds more like an excuse for Beijing's abysmal treatment of detainees, many of whom are held for months, even years, before trial, subject to physical and psychological torture to

Beijing's outrage hard to swallow

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force them to confess on television or during trials, and denied medical care for pre-existing conditions or those created by the torture and lack of proper diet and care.

After all, China is known the world over for its blatant disregard of human rights and lack of rule of law.

As Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in its World Report 2018 that covered rights issues in more than 90 countries: Chinese police “ensured the detainees’ compliance by torturing some of them, denying them access to lawyers of their choice and holding them incommunicado for months.”

As one example, the report cited women’s rights activist Su Changlan (蘇長蘭) who was arrested after voicing support for democracy activists in Hong Kong and jailed for “inciting subversion.” Su spent three years imprisoned in an 80m2 cell with more than 50 other inmates; by the time she was released she was suffering from severe heart, liver and gallbladder problems, largely due to inadequate care for a pre-existing condition.

An HRW report from 2015 said that “even Chinese officials had characterized torture in detention as ‘common,’ ‘serious’ and ‘nationwide’” — and that was before the wave of detentions and show trials stemming from the “709” crackdown on lawyers and paralegals that year.

Being detained or arrested by police is not a pleasant experience, but Meng — now free on bail — can stay in luxury at one of her Vancouver homes, albeit while wearing an electronic ankle bracelet and paying for a 24-hour security detail, until her next court date in early February.

She should be grateful that she was arrested in Canada and not at home.

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