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PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN CAMBRIDGE

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MODERATOR: The Prime Minister will take questions from the media.

Il va répondre aux questions des médias.

We'll start with Scott Laurie, CTV.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, a question on the economy. The bank of Canada came out with its monetary policy this morning. It revised growth forecasts downward. Are you concerned that the economy is slowing down (inaudible)?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, I think as you know, we also have downgraded our growth forecasts in the fall. There has been a general slowing of the global economy over the past, really past half year. So it is obviously a concern to us. And it will impact... it's going to obviously... having some fiscal impact on us, will have some impact on the pace of job creation. But look, I continue to be encouraged that in spite of the slowing in the past several months, the Canadian economy has continued to create jobs, so I think that's a positive story. Canada continues to do, you know, relatively well on most measures, compared to most other developed countries. And what I tell all Canadians is notwithstanding these fluctuations in the global economy, that will affect us, that families and businesses and ourselves as government should try and look past the fluctuations we've had over the past several years and are likely to continue to have, and look instead at what we need to do to continue to create jobs, growth and prosperity in the long term for this country, and that's why the Premier and I are making the announcement we're making today.

MODERATOR: Next question, Steven De Sousa, CBC.

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REPORTER: Good morning, Prime Minister. I'm hoping you can answer in both official languages. Just wondering what you're expecting from this upcoming meeting with AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We haven't set a date for a meeting yet, but when we met on January the 11th, we committed that in the next few weeks we would meet to follow up on a number of the items discussed not just at that meeting, but obviously at the Crown-First Nations gathering the previous year. We have, as I think you know, put out a document on a number of things that have been achieved subsequent to that, and I look forward to working with the National Chief and others to continue to make progress. I think the important thing is that we continue to make progress so that the living standards of our aboriginal people improve and that their opportunities for participation in our economy continue to improve. Those opportunities exist with resource development in remote areas, with the shortage of labour the Canadian economy's going to be experiencing, and I want to see aboriginal people, particularly young aboriginal people take full advantage of those opportunities.

JOURNALISTE : En français?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Next question, go ahead.

MODERATOR: All right, next question, Lana Nicholas, Global News.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, you touched on this already. This is your final meeting with Premier Dalton McGuinty. Any parting words, and what are your expectations or wishes for incoming Premier?

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I will... look, I hope for the incoming Premier, I'm obviously going to watch that in a completely neutral and unbiased fashion, watch that particular contest, and I hope that with the new Premier we will continue the close working relationship that Dalton and I have had over the past several years. You know, and it's not to say there aren't differences that don't arise because of the perspectives that we have, the different perspectives as First Minister of Canada versus being First Minister of Ontario, or the differences we have because of our political party. But the truth of the matter is this. I can say this to you quite frankly. One of the sort of little secrets of politics is that once you're burdened with the responsibilities of office, that what you find is that all people who have those responsibilities share a lot of the same things. They share common challenges. They share common opportunities. They share common problems, common limitations. And I think it has been shown, as Dalton himself said so eloquently, I think it has been shown over the past several years that when governments work together, and particularly work together on the economy, the results are much better. So I hope that we will continue that kind of a relationship. It has been particularly, since the recession, the great problems of '08/'09, it really has, I think, in both our governments been in a laser focus, not always the same policies, but a laser focus on the same objectives of creating jobs. I think it's been a great partnership. I hope it continues.

MODERATOR: Next question is Maria Babbich, CP.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, has there been any confirmation or proof that Canadians were among the hostage takers in a

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stand-off in Algeria, and have you spoken to the Prime Minister of Algeria to... have you spoken to them, or is it radio silence?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We are in... government, people from our government are in contact with the government of Algeria. We have no substantial information at the present time on these particular individuals, but obviously we will continue to work with the government of Algeria to find out more about this particular matter.

MODERATOR: Ok, Darryl Morris, 570 News.

REPORTER: With Research in Motion launching the Blackberry 10 next week, there's a lot of excitement. But first of all, will the federal government step in if RIM decides to go through with the sale of its handset, and any words to RIM with the launch of their Blackberry 10?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, obviously we want to see Canadian companies be successful in not just here but around the world. I don't know whether, at the moment whether anything RIM has done will or will not trigger any kind of investment review, but if it were to do so, I would obviously not be in a position to comment. I would have to withhold my comment until we've reviewed that particular matter.

MODÉRATRICE : Et la dernière question, Christian Grégoire, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE : Bonjour Monsieur Harper. En français et en anglais, s'il vous plaît. Dans le contexte actuel, quelles sont les possibilités pour le gouvernement canadien de prolonger la mission au Mali et envoyer plus de ressources militaires?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Merci pour cette question. Nous avons donné un appui d'équipement pour une durée limitée.

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Nous sommes en train de considérer notre participation, et nous sommes en consultation avec... je suis en consultation avec les partis de l'opposition aussi, et aussi mes collègues. Et nous voulons aider d'une façon... d'une façon qui peut avoir un consensus au Canada. Mais au même temps, et c'est un grand menace, et on doit répondre, mais évidemment nous ne voulons pas d'une mission militaire canadienne directe.

Je peux répondre à l'autre question un peu plus tôt sur le chef national des Assemblées des Premières nations. J'ai rencontré cette organisation au 11 janvier, et je fais un engagement d'avoir une réunion dans des semaines à venir pour poursuivre nos progrès. Nous avons... nous avons eu beaucoup de progrès pendant l'année passée sur des thèmes de l'assemblée entre la couronne et les Premières nations l'année passée, mais il reste beaucoup à faire. On veut que les autochtones participent mieux dans l'économie canadienne, et selon mes informations, il y a beaucoup de possibilités pour ça, pour la génération à venir. Nous avons une perte d'emplois. Nous aurons une perte d'emplois dans notre économie, et nous aurons des projets dans des régions où dans plusieurs cas les autochtones font la majorité de la population. Et je pense que si nous travaillons ensemble, il y a beaucoup de possibilités pour nos communautés autochtones.

Just on the question, I was asked a question on Mali. The government, as you know, has made a time-limited, a limited commitment of equipment for a limited amount of time to assist with the French mission, which we view as a very important anti-terrorist mission. The government is looking at whether and how to extend those commitments, commitments of technical support to that mission. We are in consultation. I'm obviously talking to my colleagues, and we're also in consultation with the opposition parties.

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Anything we do, I would like to see a broad Canadian consensus behind that. I do think it is important to help this mission. At the same time, I think we've been very clear, and I think this reflects Canadian opinion that while we're prepared to help, we don't want to see a direct Canadian military mission to Mali. So we will continue to look at ways we can be helpful with broad consensus in Parliament.

MODERATOR: That concludes the media availability.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Thanks, everyone.

MODERATOR: Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

(1514 words)