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SOURCE: PCO

DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 2007

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE: 1602doc1

LOCATION/LIEU: TORONTO, ON

TIME/ HEURE: 11:15

LENGTH/DURÉE: 21:25 MINUTES

**PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS AT OPENING OF HEALTH
PARTNERS INTERNATIONAL CANADA DISTRIBUTION CENTRE**

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Merci beaucoup, thank you. Thank you very much. Bonjour mesdames et messieurs, M. l'Ambassadeur, Mme la Mairesse, M. le Député. Good morning ladies and gentlemen, Ambassador Samad, Mayor McCallion, Member of Parliament Wajid Khan, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all very much for coming and thank you, Jake, for that very generous introduction.

Je suis ravi de me joindre à vous aujourd'hui pour l'ouverture officielle du Centre de distribution d'aide médicale de partenaires canadiens pour la santé internationale.

I'm very pleased to join all of you today for the official opening of this Health Partners International of Canada Medical Aid Distribution Centre. This is truly an impressive facility. Its sheer size and sophistication of its inventory and security speak to the efficiency and the professionalism of the HPIC's operations. But I hope people recognize that this place is far more than just a state of the art warehouse.

Toutes ces palettes remplies de produits médicaux et pharmaceutiques représentent la santé et l'espoir de dizaines de milliers de personnes dans les pays en voie de développement.

These palettes stacked with pharmaceutical and medical supplies represent better health and hope for tens of thousands of people in the developing world. They also represent the faith, the humanitarianism and the dedication of the people who created and sustained HPIC, people like Jake Epp and its president John Kelsall. Give them both a big hand, ladies and

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gentlemen. (APPLAUSE) And of course, all this represents the immense generosity of the dozens of Canadian grassroots and corporate donors who supplied the products and raised the funds to fill this building. Consider some of the people involved in this endeavour. It includes CEOs and senior executives from major corporations who normally are fierce competitors, yet who here come together in a common and noble cause. And then there are the smaller donors, the small businesses, church congregations, community groups, medical practitioners and individuals. They may not have as much to give, but the ocean of suffering in the developed world has touched their hearts...in the developing world, I should say. The ocean of suffering in the developing world has touched their hearts, so they donate what they can. Together they all represent the deep well of philanthropy that has been a hallmark of Canadian society throughout our history.

Encore une fois, le Canada veut à tout prix partager les bienfaits de notre grand pays avec les gens moins fortunés de la planète.

For nearly two decades, this organization has been part of that tradition, delivering medical aid to people in 116 countries around the world. This year I'm pleased to note they will concentrate on aid to Afghanistan.

Cette année cette organisation s'attachera à verser une aide à l'Afghanistan, un pays où le Canada, nos alliés et les Nations Unies se sont réunis...réunir pour rebâtir un pays ravagé par des décennies de guerre. Nos soldats ont réalisé des progrès importants l'an dernier pour sécuriser de vastes régions de la province de Kandahar. Cette année, en vue de consolider ces gains, nous devons procéder à des efforts de reconstruction, d'aide

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humanitaire et de développement dans ces régions. La prestation des services de santé de base sera essentielle à notre réussite.

HPIC and its donors made a major contribution to the Afghan mission in 2004. Their even larger contributions this year will complement the efforts of our troops, diplomats and aid workers at a critical time. Our soldiers made great progress last year in securing large sections of Kandahar province. This year to consolidate those gains, we'll need to move ahead with reconstruction, humanitarian assistance and development in those areas. Providing basic health services will be crucial to our success. HPIC is currently building several shipments of medical aid for Afghanistan. About \$1 million worth of products have already arrived here at the distribution centre. They include pain relievers, medicines to treat bacterial, fungal, viral infections, and basic medical supplies such as gloves, masks, (inaudible) and needles. Their goal is to send up to \$4 million worth of medicines and supplies to Afghanistan this year. The need is enormous. John was telling me earlier some of the terrible medical statistics in Afghanistan. Just to give you one, the average lifespan of Afghans is about 45, younger than I am now and barely half the average lifespan of Canadians.

Les efforts de ce type d'organisation sont un supplément à ceux du gouvernement du Canada. L'Afghanistan est le pays à qui nous offrons le plus d'aide humanitaire. Nos diplomates, nos agents de développement et les forces canadiennes participent de plus de cent projets de reconstruction et l'aide humanitaire dans la province de Kandahar seulement.

The efforts of organizations like this supplement the efforts of the government of Canada. Afghanistan is our biggest single recipient of foreign aid. Our diplomats, development officers and the

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Canadian Forces are involved in more than 100 reconstruction and humanitarian projects just in Kandahar province. This includes health and medical assistance like polio vaccinations for 350 000 children, maternal health, medical services and infrastructure construction. Sadly, these programs remain at risk from the Taliban. Last fall, for example, they attacked the only operational medical clinic in the Panjwaii district. They kidnapped the pharmacist and tried to kill the clinic's only doctor. Our challenge is to secure these areas and keep them secure so clinics like that can provide desperately needed medical services and supplies. Ultimately this is the path to success in all of Afghanistan.

En améliorant la santé des simples citoyens, nous les rendons beaucoup moins vulnérables à l'intimidation des talibans, et nous leur redonnerons l'espoir quant à l'avenir de leur pays.

Improving public health and raising hope in Afghanistan will not come easily or quickly. But when the need is great and the cause is just, Canadians are always there, and we always will be, because that is what Canadians do, and it's what you're doing, all of you, by supporting Health Partners International of Canada with your donations. So congratulations once again, everyone, on the opening of this great facility and the tremendous work you're doing for your fellow human beings. Thank you. Merci beaucoup, and God keep Canada strong and free. (APPLAUSE)

UNIDENTIFIED: Mr. Prime Minister, it's an honour for me to thank you on behalf of the board and the staff of Health Partners International of Canada, as well as our numerous guests from non-governmental organizations, from all five sectors of Canada's healthcare industry, from the medical community, as well as generous financial donors.

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The people here today who have heard your encouraging words are typical of thousands and thousands of generous Canadians across this country who want to make a difference in the world. Our hearts are touched by the plight of the poor, and uplifted by the willingness of your government to show leadership in turning the tide of needless suffering amongst the disadvantaged. In particular, we are troubled by the deplorable medical conditions in Afghanistan, and we are proud of what we were able to achieve with our medical aid shipment in 2004, but as Canadians, we must do much more in the medical field. So your remarks have inspired us and will surely spur us on to even greater achievements for the sake of those who die of preventable and treatable diseases. Our move into this 26 000 square foot state-of-the-art facility is the realization of a dream, and your presence here today to officially open it is the crowning of that dream. We are deeply grateful for the generous use of your time in which we know is a very hectic schedule. So on behalf of everyone here today as well as those who might be viewing this from home, I say from the bottom of my heart, thank you Mr. Prime Minister. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary):
Good morning, bonjour. We'll start with Paul Bliss, CTV. We'll just get to you a boom mic in a second.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, in light of the completion of the RCM probe into income trusts, a couple of questions. One, will you or your party apologize to Ralph Goodale for what the opposition believes has been a smearing of his name, and two, will you pull French language ads that link Mr. Goodale to the income trust leak?

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: On the contrary, I actually believe that Mr. Goodale offers...Mr. Goodale owes Canadians an apology. You will recall, he told Canadians that no one in his office or his department was involved in any kind of activity. It was the position of the Liberal Party prior to the last election that this should be swept under the carpet. In fact, I'd say they owe a particular apology to former Ambassador [sic] Zaccardelli of the RCMP. You'll recall that they said there was nothing to this scandal, it was an invention of the RCMP, and I think now that we see someone charged, that frankly only confirms the newspaper headlines that we cite in our advertising campaign.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Hugues de Roussant. Hugues de Roussant, Radio-Canada.

REPORTER: Will you pull the ads?

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Hugues de Roussant de Radio-Canada.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: No.

(SILENCE, PERSON SPEAKING OFF-MIC, FOOTSTEPS)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Ok, so I think everything's ok. On procède avec Hugues de Roussant de Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: Est-ce vous m'entendez? Oui. M. le Premier ministre, en fait, c'est la suite de la question de mon confrère. Est-ce que vous allez retirer les annonces publicitaires qui passent en ce moment au Québec et qui dit que M. Goodale est sous enquête?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Les publicités citent des manchettes. Il y a une année il parle de l'existence, évidemment, de scandales.

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Je pense que les nouvelles hier confirment l'existence de ce scandale que M. Goodale et les libéraux ont nié...nient depuis longtemps. Au contraire, comme je viens de dire, je pense que M. Goodale devrait s'excuser à la population canadienne pour nier l'existence de ces événements. Il a dit que ces événements ne se sont pas passés dans son bureau ou dans son...dans sa ministère, et je pense que l'évidence montre que c'est une...c'était un scandale réel, un vrai scandale, et en particulier et je pense que les libéraux devraient s'excuser à l'ancien commissaire Zaccardelli de la GRC pour avoir suggérer à la population canadienne que la GRC a inventé ce scandale.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Amber Gerald, CFRB.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, can you confirm that the federal government is working with Bill Gates to create a program in regards to AIDS vaccines?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: No, I can't confirm that today.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Richard Madden, City TV.

REPORTER: Hi Prime Minister, Desjardins Bank is pushing to get rid of the penny, saying that it costs four dollars per Canadian. The majority of Canadians don't want them. Wanting to get your perspective if it's time to phase out the penny.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Phase out the penny. (LAUGHTER) I don't know. I guess...you know, some days I find pennies annoying and I try and change them at cash registers for higher denominations,

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but that said, I'm kind of a coin collector from a way back, so I'd hate to lose the historic continuity of the penny. (APPLAUSE)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I don't know what else I can say. I admit, it doesn't buy much anymore, though. (LAUGHTER)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Mark Blanchard, Global.

REPORTER: Thank you. Prime Minister, speaking of Afghanistan, another call today for more NATO members support in Afghanistan, this time from President Bush. Is he talking with Canada? Is he asking Canada for more? And also, are you, speaking of the US, are you comfortable knowing that a nine-year-old Canadian boy I believe is being held in a Texas detention centre today?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: In terms of...in terms of what President Bush said yesterday, it reiterates obviously the call of Canada. The United States and our allies have expressed great appreciation of Canada's contribution, and President Bush yesterday noted a number of countries that have actually increased their contribution over the last few months. We would obviously want to keep the pressure on for that to increase. This is a...you know, this is a, as I said at the United Nations last year, this is a vital international mission. The entire international community united to come together to go to Afghanistan because of the security threat that represented. We have worked with the Afghan people in government to develop a fledgling democracy and we believe that success is critical and NATO has committed to take the lead in making this happen, and so we would obviously just want to continue to pressure our allies to do everything they can to ensure that the

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United Nations mandate is fulfilled and that NATO succeeds at this very major test.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Julia Stronach from Reuters...sorry, Global. No, Rogers. There we go.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, the Greater Toronto Airport Authority is criticizing the rental fees at Pearson International Airport, which are one of the highest in Canada, if not the highest. Is your government planning to do anything about those?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I have no comment on that today. I'm certainly aware of the issue. We have received representations on it. We know the rental fees are high; at the same time, as you know, capital investment at the airport has also been very high as well. That's part of the explanation, but we are aware of the problem.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Chris Wattie, CanWest.

REPORTER On Afghanistan, Mr. Prime Minister, the Taliban has promised a renewed offensive in Southern Afghanistan. First of all, what has General Hillier told you we can expect in terms of what's going to happen to the Canadian troops in Southern Afghanistan, and secondly, how does this, the prospect of renewed violence, more Canadian casualties, is this going to affect your commitment to the mission in Southern Afghanistan.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all we do expect a renewed spring and summer offensive. Taliban activity has been successfully kept in check now for several months, but we certainly are aware that those are the plans of the Taliban. Our soldiers, men and women who go over there know full well when they go over there that not all of them will return. That's one of the real risks in this country. At the same time, as you

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know, we are committed to being in Kandahar through February 2009. We'll obviously be assessing our next steps as we approach that date. At the same time, though, I've said all along that the position of the government of Canada is that our plan for Afghanistan is to be successful. We know it will not be easy. We know it will involve casualties, but Canada has not shrunk from these kinds of responsibilities before. We've seen our troops make tremendous progress, learn a lot, really improve security in the past several months in a difficult situation, and we think they're up to the task of ultimately being successful, but it will take clear a commitment and determination.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: And we have time for one last question, Naomi Kim from Reuters.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, when you said yesterday that you would respect C-288, does that mean you will agree to present a specific plan which will say exactly how to get to the Kyoto targets step by step, and if not, how does that show respect for the language of C-288?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, bill C-288, I remind everyone, bill C-288 prescribes no particular actions of any kind. It also does not authorize the expenditure of any funds at all. Obviously you know, what can the government do with zero money and no plan? I think it symbolizes perfectly the Liberal record on Kyoto. They want to set up ambitious targets and then have no idea how they can achieve them and not actually spend any money doing it. So as I say, we will respect the law such as it is, but the law is an empty shell.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. This brings an end to the press conference.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Thanks. (APPLAUSE)

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