

H & K Communications

72 Elvaston Avenue
Nepean, Ontario
K2G 3X9

Phone: (613) 829-1800
Fax: (613) 829-2449
E-mail: hturkow@rogers.com

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P.M. WORDS AT THE WELCOMING CEREMONY

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: I know I'm not supposed to speak, but let me just say a couple words to thank you for that very warm welcome, Prime Minister, Benjamin, you and Sara.

Laureen and I, nous sommes vraiment ravis d'être ici après une planification de longtemps.

We're delighted to be here. I just want to give one explanation. I'm here obviously with my wife, Laureen, and a tremendous delegation of not just Jewish Canadians but Canadians from across the spectrum, all of whom have been looking forward to this for some time.

The only people missing – and you and I talked about this before – are my children, Ben and Rachel. That's another visit. We had hoped, we had hoped they would be able to come, but unfortunately the way the dates fell, they are now in the middle of exams in high school. Nevertheless, they were so keen that they both approached me with a proposal that I should write a note to their teachers excusing me, excusing them from all of this, to which I explained to

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them it would not be good for me to tell their teachers that they were ill for them only to turn up on national television on a vacation.

So with that, with that unfortunate, those two missing members of the party, we're otherwise delighted to be here. You said some important things in welcoming me and I have a few things to say tomorrow in response to that. But I think I'll save that for my speech to Parliament.

In the meantime, let me just say on behalf of all of us how delighted we are to be in Israel.

(applause)

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