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P.M. JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

TRÈS HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Merci, Monsieur le Président, pour ce bel accueil.

Mr. President, I am honoured to be making my first visit to your home.

Permettez-moi tout d'abord de vous remercier pour votre accueil chaleureux et pas seulement pour l'accueil que vous avez fait à l'ensemble de la délégation canadienne aujourd'hui mais aussi pour l'hospitalité offerte à mes collègues au cours des dernières années.

John Baird who's here, our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, and Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz have all spoken very highly of your gracious hospitality and on their behalf I thank you also.

It speaks to the growth of our relationship with the Palestinian Authority that such high level visits now go both ways. Last September we were delighted to welcome Foreign Minister Malki to Ottawa for his first official visit.

Monsieur le Président, le Canada veut un brillant avenir pour les Palestiniens et les Palestiniennes.

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Mr. President, our government's desire for the Palestinian people is a future of security and prosperity enjoyed in a viable democratic Palestinian state living in peace beside Israel.

That's why Canada has chosen to help Palestinians build the institutions necessary for such a Palestinian state.

C'est pourquoi nous apportons ici à l'Autorité palestinienne depuis 20 ans de l'aide humanitaire et un soutien en matière de sécurité et nous continuerons à le faire.

J'ai aujourd'hui le plaisir d'annoncer que le Canada offrira cette année un important soutien supplémentaire pour le développement économique et institutionnel de la Cisjordanie.

Let me repeat that : I am pleased today to announce that Canada will this year provide significant further support. In the long term we also believe that stability and lasting peace will be built on economic prosperity.

Il faut que la croissance économique de futur état palestinien soit durable, qu'elle repose sur le secteur privé, facteur déterminant de la stabilité sociale, en définitif de la paix de la région.

These additional funds will therefore build on the traditional pillars of our support: continue to support the peace process, promote jobs and

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economic growth through private sector partnerships and further support security and justice sector reforms.

Mr. President, once again, thank you for your hospitality, for our frank discussions and may our partnership for peace, prosperity and security continue to grow.

MAHMOUD ABBAS (President Palestinian Authority):
Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (speaks in foreign language)

MAHMOUD ABBAS: (speaks in foreign language)

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Yes, let me just say the position of the government of Canada I think as you know well is we favour and indeed believe that these matters can only be resolved through a two-state solution with two states that are viable, prosperous, secure, democratic and living in peace and the items obviously you discussed, well, we do have our views on them, ultimately have to be resolved through negotiations between the two parties.

QUESTION: La question est pour le premier ministre Harper.
President Abbas, I will repeat my question in English for you after.

Monsieur Harper, le président, le négociateur en chef de l'Autorité palestinienne Saeb Erekat disait la semaine dernière que les politiques de votre gouvernement avaient fait en sorte que le Canada faisait partie du problème

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dans le processus de paix, que le Canada était plus israélien que les Israéliens d'une certaine façon.

Est-ce que le parti pris de votre gouvernement envers Israël fait en sorte que vous avez en quelque sorte négligé les problèmes, les défis auxquels sont confrontés les Palestiniens ici?

So, President Abbas, I'll repeat in English for you. Your chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said last year that the Harper government policies made Canada part of the problem in the peace process and that Canada has become more Israeli than the Israelis. So do you share that view and is Canada too one-sided with regard to the peace process and has neglected the plight of the Palestinians?

MAHMOUD ABBAS: (speaks in foreign language).

TRÈS HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Évidemment le Canada comprend très bien les défis auxquels les Palestiniens sont confrontés. C'est la raison pour laquelle depuis longtemps et encore aujourd'hui nous appuyons certaines mesures pour améliorer la vie et le progrès des Palestiniens et de son état. Et même en même temps nous appuyons le processus de la paix. Le Canada a une position de principes, appuyée par la grande majorité des Canadiens et Canadiennes. Ce n'est pas une position israélienne-palestinienne mais à la base ma position est que c'est pour les deux parties de trouver une solution aux problèmes et aux disputes entre eux.

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So let me just repeat that. We obviously understand the various challenges that Palestinians face. That's why again today and obviously over a long period of time the government of Canada has supported Palestinians in critical areas, humanitarian aid, economic development, security development, the peace process, and we will continue to do so. Canada is a strong supporter of the peace process. Our position is not an Israeli position or a Palestinian position. It is a Canadian position of principles, supported by the overwhelming majority of Canadians. And at its heart is our belief that the critical issues must be resolved through negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

QUESTION: (speaks in foreign language).

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, Canada has not been asked to accept a particular number of Palestinian refugees. As you may know in the past Canada has had a role, kind of an international chairmanship, on an eventual refugee issue. We're always prepared to play a helpful role with the agreement of the two sides. Obviously I think we're a long way from that in terms of the substance of the peace process. But specifically Canada has not been asked to accept a certain number of refugees.

MAHMOUD ABBAS: (speaks in foreign language)

QUESTION: Mark Kennedy, Postmedia News.

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Prime Minister Harper, a question for you, if you can, sir. Please answer in both official languages. The question is this: We are seeking some clarity about an issue that clearly is very important here in the West Bank and in Israel, and that resolves around Israeli settlements, those that already exist and those that are being built now.

Your government, sir, in recent days has talked of that matter as not being helpful. In terms of it being a unilateral action. I suppose that's not my question. What we really want to find out whether is whether you as Canada's Prime Minister are of the view that existing Israeli settlements, those that are now being built, are a violation of the law, whether they're illegitimate, whether they're illegal and whether they violate the Fourth Geneva Convention.

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I think you will not be surprised by my answer, which is to be very clear to you, that any attempt to have me while present in the Middle East single out the state of Israel for criticism, I will not do. And I've been very clear on that in the past. The positions of the government on the specific matter you mentioned are well known. They've been public. They are known to both parties.

Encore une fois, je n'ai aucune intention pendant ce voyage au Moyen-Orient de critiquer d'une façon isolée l'État d'Israël. C'est ma position depuis longtemps. Pour les particuliers, les choses particulières que vous venez de

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mentionner, les positions du gouvernement du Canada sont là depuis longtemps et elles sont connues par les deux parties des négociations.

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