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**PM HARPER REMARKS AT MEDIA ROUNDTABLE**

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RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Ready to go guys? Everyone is ready? Okay, well, I'll begin.

First of all, bonne après midi. Good afternoon everybody and thank you all for joining us. I know it's been fairly short notice. There's a long story behind that. But we appreciate all of you making yourselves available. I am delighted to be here with my colleagues, all Members of Parliament from this part of the country, from the lower mainland the Minister of State for Seniors, Alice Wong, Member of Parliament Nina Grewal, and of course Senator Yonah Kim Martin has joined us as well.

We have with us, as you all know, journalists from a variety of outlets in the Lower Mainland representing ethnic... So-called ethnic or cultural media. And I know... I've met all of you, just about all of you before and you've heard me say this before, but let me just reiterate again that it is very important that we keep meeting like this from our perspective.

We understand that in this diverse region, that you serve an awful lot of people. They talk about the mainstream media but I suggest that there's many people around this table representing outlets that are listened to, watched, or heard by many more people than often listen to so-called mainstream media. And in fact in most cases I think also you're ... you're taken as more authoritative sources of information to the people who are your listeners and your viewers and your audience than is the case. So it's very important for us to keep meeting with you, keep answering your questions, and also to congratulate you on the work that you do.

Look, we're starting a new year here. And I'll maybe just summarize it very quickly in saying what I've said this year could have been said in previous years but it's worth saying again. We remain in a global

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economy that is very challenging, that is full of uncertainties. We've seen some of the movement in oil, energy, and commodity prices in recent weeks. It's just an indication of the kind of economic and political instability that still exists around the world.

That, notwithstanding, notwithstanding our own challenges which remain significant, the Canadian economy and Canada as a country continue to do comparatively very well. In fact I think I can say with a great deal of certainty that when I sit around the international table at the G-20 or many of these other fora and you were to ask the leaders which country, which economy around this table is the most politically and economically stable of any, I think there would be virtually unanimous agreement it is this country.

So we have lots to be thankful for, but we do have challenges ahead of us. As you know we intend to navigate those challenges through sticking to our fundamental objectives in the year to come. We will balance our budget at the federal level. We will do that while continuing to lower taxes – we'll talk about some of the things we've been doing lately – and continuing to make sure vital services like health care, education, the big transfers we make to the provinces, that those things continue to grow.

Obviously we're tackling challenges in the immigration and labour market system that I know are of concern to many of your... to your readers and listeners and viewers and I think we've made considerable progress on that front. I think we are gradually getting an immigration system that is more responsible to the needs of Canada and also to the needs of applicants.

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One of the big achievements by this government over the past couple of years has been the diversification of our trade, new trade agreements with the European Union, obviously more recently with the Republic of Korea, and ongoing negotiations, the FIPPA with China. We're connecting this economy better than it's ever been connected to the growing global economy, something that I know is also of interest to your... to your audiences.

We will continue to be focused as well on other issues. Obviously on taking important stands on important international issues and tackling crime here at home. Tackling crime here at home as we've continued to do since we came to office but also an extension of that, unfortunately a more serious extension, is tackling terrorism both at home and around the world.

And I'm just going to take a moment to comment on today's events. Obviously what has occurred in France today is, I think, terribly shocking to all of us. We have seen a spate of these incidents around the world, including in this country and Australia, elsewhere. But today, even by some of those standards, is a particularly outrageous, vile, and disgusting act that I think obviously all Canadians abhor. But I think the nature of this, targeted as it is at a media outlet and free expression, really does highlight what we have been saying for a very long time, that the forces behind these jihadist terrorist movements around the world are dedicated to attacking the very values for which our civilization stands – freedom, democracy, pluralism, tolerance. These are the things that these people abhor. These are the things that they attack. And we have to understand, whether we like the fact or not, that we have had to take strong action here and around the world engaging

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in ... engaging in military action, for instance, in the Middle East. We have to face the fact, whether we like it or not, these people have declared war on us. And we have to be prepared to defend what we stand for and to work with our allies.

Obviously I want to take the opportunity when we are talking about such outrageous acts first of all to send, on behalf of all Canadians, our condolences and our sympathies to all of the people who have been directly touched by these attacks, obviously the victims, their families, their friends. They are going to be in our thoughts and prayers I know in the days to come. The entire French nation, which I know is really shocked and will be having a day of mourning tomorrow. And I know certainly from my level and all levels of the government we offer our ongoing friendship and assistance to the government of France as they move forward to deal with the fallout of this particular incident. But it is a very sad day.

But unfortunately a day that reminds us that these threats we face, the security challenges that we've had to tackle here in Canada, the military actions we've had to take around the world, that these things are very necessary and will continue to be very necessary if we are continue to... if we are going to continue to be the kind of free, democratic, and tolerant society that these people want to eradicate. So we will redouble our efforts on that front.

Thanks everybody.

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