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**PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS AT CONSERVATIVE CAUCUS**

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(APPLAUSE)

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Premier ministre du Canada): Thank you, merci beaucoup. Merci Rahim, merci tout le monde, et bonjour. Je suis fier, nous sommes tous et toutes fiers d'accueillir nos collègues parlementaires élues d'Afghanistan aujourd'hui. Il y a quelques années... même il y a quelques années, il était, il serait très difficile d'imaginer des députés élus de l'Afghanistan, et même surtout d'imaginer des députées élues femmes, mais aujourd'hui... (APPLAUDISSEMENTS) Mais aujourd'hui ils sont parmi nous.

Colleagues, as I said, even a few short years ago, it would have been extremely difficult to imagine us meeting with elected colleagues from the country of Afghanistan, particularly difficult for us to imagine meeting with elected female colleagues from the country of Afghanistan. (APPLAUSE) This is a tremendous development. I do not want to recount, I'm sure these courageous women can recount for you how difficult life was under the Taliban and how difficult the rebuilding of that country has been. So I won't get into all of that. But I want you to imagine for a minute what life is like being a Parliamentarian and a female Parliamentarian even today in that country.

Plus tôt, plus tard ce matin, nous chanterons l'hymne nationale. L'hymne nationale du Canada parle de nos aïeux. Nous oublions... nous oublions toujours, nous oublions trop souvent la réalité que nos aïeux ont gagné, nos libertés, notre démocratie et nos droits par des batailles très difficiles, par des... (APPLAUDISSEMENTS) Nous avons aujourd'hui, nous connaissons la réalité qu'à titre de politicien du Canada, la vie politique est de

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temps en temps difficile. Le pire, mais le pire que nous puissions parfois subir sont de méchantes critiques publiques de nos adversaires. Nos aïeux, nos aïeux ont souffert. Ils ont mis leurs vies en péril pour gagner les libertés, la démocratie et les droits que nous avons aujourd'hui. Ça, c'est la réalité, et nous ne devons jamais oublier cette réalité de notre histoire. Et avec la connaissance de cette réalité nous pouvons mieux comprendre la lutte qui continue en Afghanistan aujourd'hui avec l'aide de nos troupes, nos diplomates et nos travailleurs de l'aide humanitaire.

Now colleagues, as I just said, our national anthem, at least the French words of our national anthem speak of our ancestors. Our ancestors won the freedom, the liberty and the democracy that we enjoy today through sacrifice. The worst thing we experience in politics these days is terrible attacks and things that we will face in public, critiques from the media and from our adversaries. But our ancestors won the rights we enjoy today through suffering and through putting their lives on the line to win these things for us, and we must never forget that. We must also use that understanding to realize what these fine Parliamentarians of Afghanistan are doing today. They have not just been elected to office. They are fighting to change the history of their country. Their lives are on the line every single day so that their daughters as well as their sons can enjoy the freedoms they are only beginning to taste. And of course they're doing that, and we're proud they're doing that with the assistance of our men and women in uniform, our diplomats and our aid workers. (APPLAUSE)

Chers collègues, j'ai parlé plus long que c'était mon intention, mais je voudrais dire...je juste...je voudrais dire juste encore, imaginez le courage de ces femmes et de leurs collègues en Afghanistan, et

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souvenez-vous toujours l'importance de la mission, le visage humain de notre lutte en Afghanistan. Il n'y a pas de mots suffisants pour exprimer l'importance de nos efforts.

Once again, colleagues, as I say, I've gone on long enough. Just understand the importance in human terms of what we are doing in Afghanistan to help that country, the dangers that our own people are taking upon their shoulders, but imagine also the Afghan people on whose behalf they are working, particularly these women who are here with us today, these women Parliamentarians. Imagine the dangers they are taking on their shoulders to lead their country and the world in a better place. I don't think there's much more we can say other than we are extremely honoured to have you with us today and I would call on one of you, the MP for Bamiyan, Safoura Alkani, to come and address us for a moment. Thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

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