

Canada cannot, without losing all credibility in the international arena, simply go back on its word and abandon such a crucial mission.

We also cannot simply abandon the Afghan people to their fate; to do so would jeopardize all the development work and security building that has been done on the ground.

I would like to speak directly to those Quebeckers who want an immediate end to this mission.

I know that you are proud and responsible people, people of your word.

Quebeckers finish the job they have started when they have made a commitment to do so.

Yesterday, the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, addressed Quebeckers. He said:

"My message to Quebec is that the sons and daughters of Quebec who are serving in Afghanistan today are accomplishing an extremely important task, not only for Afghanistan, but for Canada and all of us around this world as well."

Let me conclude by saying that I hope that after these two days you gain greater knowledge about our mission in Afghanistan and the important role that our country is playing there.

For my part, I intend to keep emphasizing to the international community the importance that Canada attaches to the emergence of a stable, free and more prosperous Afghanistan.

I did that earlier this month during the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit in Sydney, Australia, and I will do so again next week at the UN's General Assembly in New York.

The international community has a responsibility and a role to play in Afghanistan. And for those who don't agree, I leave you with some words from President Karzai. For he, above all others, knows and appreciates the importance of Canada's contributions.

"If you leave prematurely, Afghanistan will fall back. My message to Quebec is that their sons and daughters are accomplishing a very important task, not only for Afghanistan but for Canada as well."

Thank you.