



# PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

*Canadian Mission in Afghanistan*

## THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS WILL VOTE AGAINST EXTENDING THE MISSION BECAUSE IT REFUSES TO GIVE THE CONSERVATIVES A BLANK CHECK

Ottawa, Wednesday, May 17, 2006—Bloc Québécois Leader **Gilles Duceppe** announced today that the Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion to extend the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan, because it refuses to give Stephen Harper a blank check on such an important issue.

“The Bloc Québécois believes it is the government’s duty to inform parliamentarians and the public before making a commitment of this nature. An issue of this magnitude requires a real sharing of information. There must, therefore, be an enlightened debate which provides answers to all our questions. But instead, we are seeing something this is unacceptable, what we are seeing is political manoeuvring and electioneering in getting this decision made quickly,” said the Bloc Québécois Leader.

**Mr. Duceppe** pointed out that, last week, the Bloc Québécois tabled a motion before the Standing Committee on Defence, for the committee to study the various aspects of Canada’s military presence in Afghanistan. The motion was passed yesterday with the support of the NDP and the Liberals.

“Even though he was told about the motion and the likelihood that it would be passed by the majority of committee members, Stephen Harper preferred to move ahead with the vote. So clearly, he was acting like a party leader rather than like a responsible statesman, to the disadvantage of all Quebecers and all Canadians. As parliamentarians, members of Parliament are responsible for giving explanations to the people about the decisions being made. How can we explain anything or convince people when we do not have access to the information that would enable us to make an informed decision?” asked **Gilles Duceppe**.

“Stephen Harper will keep on making this an election issue, and this is why he will not respect the decision made by the House committee. His attitude is all the more reprehensible because, when his party was in Opposition, Stephen Harper always complained that the government at the time did not respect to decisions made by the House and by its committees, and that this approach was morally wrong!” said the Bloc Québécois Leader.

According to the Bloc Québécois, the work of the Standing Committee on Defence should make it possible find answers to the following questions:

- Does anyone know how long the mission in Afghanistan will really last?
- The Conservatives estimate costs at nearly \$2 billion—is this a realistic figure? Do these figures include all costs: amounts paid to soldiers, higher amounts for equipment maintenance and the procurement of new materiel? Is it in fact even possible to estimate how much the mission will cost?
- What criteria are used to evaluate the mission's success?
- What is the strategy for achieving the objectives in terms of peace-building and reconstruction?
- What about development assistance?
- How can we be sure that activities relating to Afghanistan's reconstruction will not be marginalized by activities that are essentially military?
- On November 15, the current Minister of Defence asked a series of questions, one of which involved a withdrawal plan if the mission turned out badly. Does the Minister have this plan? Under what circumstances would a withdrawal be considered? What guarantees do we have that the hard line will not be stubbornly followed?
- Moreover, what about the treatment of civilians and the effectiveness of the agreement on the treatment of prisoners signed with the Afghan government? And what about the use of antipersonnel mines?

“Stephen Harper must realize that, with only 36% of the votes, he has a minority government, that the Opposition members are representing the concerns of people in Quebec and in Canada, that he has less than 25% in Quebec and that, as he said himself last year when he was in Opposition, it is the duty of the Prime Minister to recognize the views that the people's elected representatives bring to the House of Commons,” said **Gilles Duceppe**.

“Considering that it would be irresponsible for members of Parliament to vote with their eyes closed and also considering that the Prime Minister wants to make a hasty decision, we have no other option but to vote against the plan that has been presented. This does not mean that, later on, once we have answers to all our questions, we might not support extending the mission,” said **Gilles Duceppe**.

– 30 –

Information:

Karine Sauv , Leader's Press Attach ,  
Office of the Leader of the Bloc Qu b cois  
Tel.: (613) 947-2495  
Cell: (613) 296-1596  
[www.blocquebecois.org](http://www.blocquebecois.org)