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Democratic principles take centre stage during PM Harper's visit to Ukraine

KYIV – LVIV, UKRAINE: During an intense two-day official visit to Ukraine, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper emphasized Canada's special relationship with Ukraine, highlighting a commitment to democratic principles and closer economic ties with Ukraine.

During his program in Kyiv, the Prime Minister paid respect to the victims of Ukraine's famine-genocide at the Holodomor Monument. The Prime Minister's itinerary in Ukraine also included official meetings with Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, and others.

During a press conference attended by international journalists, Harper spoke emotionally, recalling the Ukrainian nation's 10 million innocent victims targeted by Stalin's totalitarian regime. Ukrainians were "killed through the deliberate plans of their own government," Harper said to the packed room of journalists at the Presidential Administration.

"I hope always that it will remind the Ukrainian people of the importance of their freedom and democracy and independence, and of the necessity of always defending those things."

The Prime Minister's itinerary in Lviv included a visit to the National Museum *Memorial Prison at Lontsky Street*, the infamous prison where thousands of political prisoners were tortured and executed by the Soviets and the Nazis. Writing in the book of the Memorial Museum, Harper noted that "it is important that the terrible things here not be forgotten or repeated. We are reminded that the heart can be broken, the body can be destroyed but the spirit of the oppressed is eternal and grows stronger."

Earlier that day in a speech at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Harper told students that more Ukrainians died during the Holodomor/Genocide than the total population of Canada at the time. He concluded his remarks by saying: "Remember that in Canada you have friends— friends who respect and admire Ukraine's heart for freedom, its spirit of national self-determination, and the courage of its people, a courage that has never deserted you, even in the darkest nights of your long history."

Representatives of the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Canadian Friends of Ukraine, the League of Ukrainian Women, and Ukrainian Youth Association of Canada (SUM), were among the Ukrainian-Canadian non-governmental organizations included in the Prime Minister's official delegation.

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