REMARKS

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following the meeting of the E3/EU+3 with Iran, 15/16 October 2013

Ladies and gentlemen

This has been a very intensive and I think a very important meeting. Over the course of the last two days we have met in different formations with Foreign Minister Zarif and his team.

I want to thank them for their commitment and for the efforts they have made to respond to the questions we have raised. I’d also want to pay tribute to the E3+3 for their work and engagement that they have had this week.

Following a number of working sessions, we have agreed, for the first time, a joint statement, which I will read to you now, before taking some of your questions:

"Delegations of the E3+3 and the Islamic Republic of Iran, led respectively by the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and Foreign Minister of Iran, held two days of substantive and forward looking negotiations in Geneva on 15-16 October 2013.

Building on the positive atmosphere of the first ministerial meeting held in New York on 26 September, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran presented an outline of a plan as a proposed basis for negotiation, which is being carefully considered by the E3+3 as an important contribution."
Members of delegations followed with in-depth bilateral and joint consultations on various elements of the approach. It was decided to convene the next meeting in Geneva on November 7-8. The participants also agreed that E3+3 and Iranian nuclear, scientific and sanctions experts will convene before the next meeting to address differences and to develop practical steps.”

Question: Lady Ashton, do you have the feeling this afternoon that Iran will comply with one of the most serious requirements and conditions of the international community, which is to stop the enrichment to 20% level?

High Representative Ashton: One of the things that we have all agreed is that we are not going to talk about the details, about discussions and the work that is going on. All of you who could have followed any kind of negotiations or discussions of this kind will know how important what I have just said is. We are not going to talk now about details.

Question: Iran has done many confidence building in the past. What about 5+1? And what's your program for the 5+1 making the confidence building toward Iran?

High Representative Ashton: Well, you know I have been involved in discussions with Iran for nearly three years and I can tell you that we have always sought to put forward ideas that can help to build confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program. In our work, in the detailed work that we are doing and we are engaged in, we will always continue to look for ways in which we can do that.

Question: I know it's something you just said, that you don't want to discuss details but there is a lot of confusion about the plan that was put forward by Foreign Minister Zarif. It seems to be suggesting that they are discussing the end state and a series of concrete steps that will be taken once there is an agreement for the program? Is that right?

High Representative Ashton: Well, we always like to make sure that we dispel confusion. So let me say this much. When we have been talking in these last days, we know that we have to look for a first step, a confidence building step. And we also have to be extremely clear on what it is – we consider to be – the last steps. And to do that within the context of what the objective is overall. That is a kind of framework that we have always worked within and it's a framework – I will say to you – a pretty good description of the sort of approach that we will take.

Question: Can you give some impressions after the session today, how detailed was the discussion on the programme itself?

High Representative Ashton: The most detailed that we have ever had, I would say, by a long way.
Question: Many people have been saying that this round of Talks is different. Can you outline how different they have been? For instance, have you agreed to the Iranians having the capability of enrichment of uranium?

High Representative Ashton: This is important. It’s new that we have had the opportunity to talk, as I have already indicated, in much greater details than ever before. Answer each other’s questions, to have the opportunity, as I already indicated, in different formats. I say it again. I am not going to go into the details. What I would say is that positions have been set out on a number of issues already. And I would say to you that you need to allow us the space to now really have the opportunity to move forward.

Question: If I can in general terms one of the key disagreements is: are sanctions eased at the same time as Iran imposes restrictions on its Nuclear programme or only after confidence building measures? We know what the Iranian’s position is. Has that issue been addressed to you and are the western powers willing to ease those sanctions or do they have to see something first before they’re willing to take that step.

High Representative Ashton: And how is that question fitting with my comments about not going into details?

Question: Can you please give us more details? Many prominent law makers in the US including democratic lawmakers said that they will not touch the existing US sanctions against Iran. Are you confident that the American side can deliver the relaxation of sanctions when we get to that stage?

High Representative Ashton: Look, if and when we go forward, we have the United States of America firmly part of the team and the work that we do and we would do things together. When the Security Council asked me to lead these talks, we decided we would work as a team and we will do this together, and that I can show you is exactly the approach that we will take.