REMARKS

by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the opening session of
the EU-Myanmar Task Force

"It’s wonderful to stand here in front of a big group of people who have come together - as I said last night - in the spirit of celebration and expectation. We come together - Ministers, colleagues, friends - to celebrate the journey that this country is on, to celebrate the changes that have taken place in a short period of time, but also to recognise the expectations that we have and that the people of this country have and to recognise the role we can play together in realising these expectations.

Members of the European Union who are here come from a wide variety of backgrounds and many of them know the journey very well. They have been part of their nations journey to democracy, to freedom, to allowing for freedom of human rights and of expression, to enabling a strong economy to grow and develop.

I want to thank the Members of the European Parliament led by Isabel Durant, business leaders who have come from the European Union, all of the members of civil society from Myanmar and the EU, all my colleagues who have worked so hard. Especially I want to thank Vice-President Tajani, Andris Piebalgs and Dacian Cioloş, the Commissioners who have ensured the representation here, but have also ensured the commitment of the European institutions. I also want to thank the representatives of the financial institutions who are here as well, not least the European Investment Bank.

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They all come here today to celebrate and to raise expectations. The point about the Task Force is not about just one day or two, the point is to bring together different parts of society in determination to ensure that this nation with our help is successful. We bring together business leaders who are interested in investment, most importantly in partnership. We bring together civil society who want to learn from you, who want to explore with you, again in partnership. We bring politicians who want to work in partnership, it is the role and purpose of the EU Task Force to be a strong partner, with humility, because we know the journey and we know how difficult the journey can be, but how worthwhile the journey is.

So this is a beginning. The Task Force will continue to meet, maybe not in such a big gathering, but in different ways, through the meetings of civil society, through the work of parliamentarians, through the work of business leaders, through the Chamber of Commerce, through the agreements that we will sign.

All this is an expression of the EU’s commitment and willingness. More than anything it’s about showing the people of this country that we believe they deserve a better future - a future that will give them all that they aspire to. A democratic nation, where they are free, where their rights are respected, where their aspirations are fulfilled.

It is something I believe that you, Minister U Soe Thane, talked about in your speech that the people who lead this country are committed to, but where we know that we need to be impatient to make sure we achieve that together.

But more than anything else I want to thank all the people who have stood for their belief in the future of this country and are being prepared to show the willingness to move forward. And in thanking them I want to send a message to the people of Myanmar that we will stand with them and support them, for as long as it takes, to help this country reach what we believe it can be - a beacon in this region and the world for democracy, peace and prosperity.

Thank you."