Remarks by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the situation in Egypt ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council, 31 January 2011

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made today the following remarks:

"Obviously we have been monitoring very closely events in Egypt over the last few days and been in close contact with our delegation on the ground (who I spoke to this morning), Member States, international partners.

Ambassadors met here in Brussels this morning at my request to prepare for the discussion which we will be having shortly in the Foreign Affairs Council.

I believe it is important that the European Union stands ready to assist Egypt now and, of course, into the future.

But let me say I deeply regret the loss of life and the high number of injuries. It is essential that everyone – and this includes, of course, especially the police forces – to show restraint so that further violence can be avoided.

We urge the authorities to release, immediately, all peaceful demonstrators who are in detention.

You know the European Union has, at its heart, democracy, the rule of law, human rights – these are our values and we believe these must be respected by the Egyptian authorities.

And the legitimate grievances of the Egyptian people should be responded to – their aspirations for a just, for a better future should be met with urgent, concrete and decisive answers and with real steps.

There needs to be a peaceful way forward based on an open and serious dialogue with the opposition parties and all parts of civil society, and we believe it needs to happen now."

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FOR FURTHER DETAILS:
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu
Darren Ennis +32 498 963 293 - +32 2 296 32 93 - Darren.Ennis@ec.europa.eu
COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu
www.eea.europa.eu