Statement by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on the assassination of the Minister of Minorities in the Government of Pakistan, Mr Shahbaz Bhatti

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

"I have just learned, with great sadness, that the Minister of Minorities in the Government of Pakistan, Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated this morning in Islamabad.

I strongly condemn the murder of a member of the Government who was well known for his defence of the principles of equality and human rights which are enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan.

I am also deeply concerned about the climate of intolerance and violence linked to the debate on the controversial blasphemy laws. I urge the Pakistani authorities to do their utmost to ensure the protection of those in the Government and civil society who have spoken out on these matters, and to bring to justice those responsible for this crime.

I would like to offer my most sincere condolences to Mr Bhatti's family".