High Representative Catherine Ashton met Sudanese Foreign Minister, Ali Karti

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Catherine Ashton met the Sudanese Foreign Minister, Ali Karti, yesterday afternoon in Brussels.

The High Representative said she was seriously concerned about the reports of what was happening in Southern Kordofan, particularly the impact on civilians. She called on the parties to conclude a Cessation of Hostilities agreement as quickly as possible and to allow full humanitarian access.

She welcomed the signature of an agreement on 28 June between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (North) on political and security arrangements in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states and urged the parties to start implementing the agreement as quickly as possible. She also called for a continuing UN presence in both states after 9 July.

The High Representative said: "The EU was committed to long-term peace and stability in the two Sudans and to continue to help the people of both North and South. The EU wanted to see good neighbourly relations between Sudan and South Sudan living together peacefully as two viable states after 9 July." She urged both parties to make full use of the good offices of former President Mbeki to resolve as many outstanding issues as possible before 9 July. The Sudanese Foreign Minister expressed interest in EU support for building North-South economic and infrastructural links in the broader context of regional cooperation.

The High Representative noted that the secession of South Sudan was an opportunity for the North to start a new chapter in EU/Sudan relations but stressed that certain obstacles would need to be removed, most immediately in relation to Southern Kordofan. The EU hoped to see progress on democratic governance and an inclusive constitutional review process. This would send an important signal in the broader context of EU/Sudan relations.