EU High Representative Catherine Ashton to visit Japan

Brussels, 31 October 2011 - Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission, will visit Japan from 1 to 3 November. In Tokyo she will meet the Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba. She will also visit Miyagi Prefecture, one of the areas hit hardest by the triple catastrophe of 11 March.

Ahead of her visit Catherine Ashton said: “With my visit I want to express the deep and enduring friendship between the EU and Japan. The EU is committed to a balanced and comprehensive strengthening of relations with Japan, covering both political and economic aspects. The two sides have agreed to work towards parallel negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement and a Framework Agreement covering political, global and sectoral issues. I hope the meeting with Minister Gemba will further that resolve as well as our cooperation in different domains. I will also visit Miyagi Prefecture to express the EU's solidarity with the people affected by the devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident of 11 March.”

During her trip the High Representative will focus on strengthening EU-Japan dialogue and cooperation in the field of peace and security as well as on reiterating the EU’s readiness to deepen cooperation in the fields of nuclear safety and disaster management.

On Wednesday 2 November, she will meet the Foreign Minister. They will discuss foreign policy issues, including the regional security situation, the Middle East and North Africa and the fight against piracy, as well as the strengthening of bilateral relations decided at the EU-Japan summit of 28 May. The High Representative will also officially inaugurate the Europa House, the new premises of the Delegation of the European Union to Japan.
On Thursday 3 November, in Miyagi Prefecture, the High Representative will visit the devastated town of Higashi-Matsushima. She will tour the area, meet local volunteers, people living in temporary housing and city officials. She will lay flowers at the site of the Nobiru Elementary School.

Background:

**EU-Japan Bilateral Relations:**
At the last EU-Japan Summit on 28 May 2011 the leaders agreed to start the process for parallel negotiations for:

– a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)/Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), addressing all issues of shared interest to both sides including tariffs, non-tariff measures, services, investment, Intellectual Property Rights, competition and public procurement; and

– a binding agreement, covering political, global and other sectoral cooperation in a comprehensive manner, and underpinned by their shared commitment to fundamental values and principles.

Summit leaders decided, to this end, that the two sides would start discussions with a view to defining the scope and level of ambition of both negotiations. This scoping exercise is currently ongoing. The European Commission will seek the necessary authorization for the negotiations of these agreements on the basis of a successful scoping.

**The EU response to triple disaster**
The EU was one of the first to offer both material and financial aid to Japan, and both the EU and individual Member States have since been active in many areas, including Miyagi Prefecture\(^1\). The EU, working with the Red Cross, has equipped temporary homes in Higashi-Matsushima. A number of other Member States are also providing assistance to the city: Demark has been active in helping local children by renovating local schools and kindergartens. Slovenia is donating housing; and a number of European enterprises have donated specialist equipment, including to drain paddy fields of sea water.

\(^1\) According to official figures, some 9,450 people have died in Miyagi as a result of the disaster; more than 1,000 in the city of Higashi-Matsushima alone, where the High Representative will visit.