Remarks with Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd, following launch of negotiations on an EU-Australia Framework Agreement

Canberra, 31 oct. 11

"Thank you, Kevin. Can I begin by offering condolences on behalf of all of the 27 member states of the European Union to the families and friends of the three servicemen killed in Afghanistan and to those who've been injured. We stand with Australia in recognising the vital work of your servicemen and women in Afghanistan and certainly in my visits to Afghanistan one can see the tremendous work that's going on by those servicemen and women and by many others who are collaborating with them to try and deliver peace and security in that country.

This is my fourth visit to Australia, twice as a tourist, once as leader of the House of Lords and now as High Representative.

It's a fantastic country and it's a great delight to be back because we are able today to start doing things that I describe as being joined up EU-Australia work.

I pay tribute to the energy which has been put in by Australia and by you, Kevin, to help us get to the point where we're able to move forward on this new agreement. As you say, its purpose being to bring us closer in terms of the political and economic work that we do together.

On my way to meeting you I popped in to see an old friend, Simon Crean, and I mention Simon because I want to pay tribute to the role that Australia has played consistently on the Doha Development Round.

When I was Trade Commissioner it was an enormous privilege to work very closely with Australia as we tried to push forward to deliver that round. Now, we will have to see what happens in the future but I wouldn't want to let the opportunity pass without recognising that apart from the odd trade irritant we've also been great trade partners in trying to do more to support the developing world.
As Kevin said too, it is a first for the European Union to be working in this way with another country to deliver our aid programmes. I think it will be to the benefit of what's happening in the Pacific and perhaps especially in Fiji and to the benefit in South Sudan where we're able to join forces in a coherent way to enable our aid to be delivered more effectively.

I hope it's the first of many such opportunities. No doubt we'll learn as we go how to make it even more effective but I think it's a better use of your taxpayers' money and our taxpayers' money, a better use of the expertise and resources that we have and certainly will deliver on the ground a much more productive outcome for people who are in serious need of support.

As Kevin has said too, we're going to cover in our conversations during today a number of different foreign policy issues. I should say that we are in touch a great deal to talk about the events that go on in this part of the world and perhaps more recently in my part of the world, in what we call our neighbourhood, in Tunisia, in Egypt, with the Middle East peace process. But in all of this I look to Australia as a strong ally and friend as we look to support people in times of change, as they go through both economic change but also that tremendous change towards what we hope will be real and fruitful democracies in the future.

Thank you. "