Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
following her meeting with the Foreign Minister of Mexico Patricia Espinosa, Mexico City, 9 February 2012

First of all can I thank you, Minister, for inviting me to Mexico. I've long wanted to come to this wonderful country and it's a great personal and professional pleasure to be here. I think it's especially important because I have said that one of my priorities for my term of office is to strengthen our relations with strategic partners. The partnership that we have with Mexico is unique amongst our partnerships, because it's based on our Association and Free Trade Agreement as well as our strong bilateral commitment to tackling some of the global challenges together. I therefore see this relationship as something very special, something that we need to deepen and strengthen in the years to come.

I was extremely pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the President this morning and to be able to pay tribute to the work that he and the government have done in tackling some of the challenges that you face, especially on organized crime. I was keen to re-commit the support of the European Union to assist in the work that is going on. By that I mean inviting agencies like Europol or Frontex, who are able to offer new ways of trying to support catching criminals. But we invite our partners to tell us what they need. We don't impose what we think they might wish. There are some difficult challenges to face but I believe you have faced them in a way that will take your country forward and which will deal with these problems not just in the short term, but for the long term.
I will be very pleased to be returning to Mexico again in a week's time for the informal meeting of foreign ministers of the G20 and other guests that you have invited for that occasion. I believe this is a really interesting initiative, not only will it give us a chance to talk of some of the key issues that we are currently facing, but also allow us to have an in-depth conversation on a topic that I know is of enormous importance to Mexico and which I share your commitment to, and that is sustainable development. Again in the conversation with the President this morning I think we were able to share some of the issues and ideas that need to be put forward in order to be able to ensure that we are moving on sustainable development.

And this country's commitment to the issue of climate change plays into that whole agenda - how do we help countries to develop appropriately in recognition of the challenges that climate change is presenting to many countries across the world?

We have had the opportunity today as well to talk about some of the issues perhaps at the top of your agenda and certainly at the top of mine. We have talked about the Middle East Peace Process and the current efforts of the King of Jordan, to whom I pay tribute, to try and get the negotiations to move forward. We have talked about the challenges within that process to reach some form of conclusion at least on some of the major issues at the present time.

We have also discussed the terrible situation in Syria and compared our common view about the need to stop this tragedy from unfolding further. My disappointment at what happened at the Security Council, my belief that the international community should stand together and we will see in the coming hours and days what more can be done. I have been in contact with the Secretary General of the Arab League in the last few days and I will speak to other ministers in the course of today and tomorrow. Our common objective is to enable the people of Syria to move forward peacefully and for President Assad to recognize that he needs to stand aside.

One of our greatest concerns is also to provide humanitarian aid and support for people. We have already added additional resources, we have a delegation on the ground and we hope that we will be able to work with the countries in the neighbourhood, particularly the four neighbouring countries, to work out how we can provide the best possible support. A lot of ideas are being discussed, there are proposals to get countries together in a group to think through what more we might be able to do. Our interests are all the same: to stop the killing, to persuade the leadership in Syria to take its responsibilities seriously, to recognize that there need to be changes, but that that change needs to be inclusive to bring together the whole of Syrian society in ways that will enable them to have the future that they wish. And in that context my message to my Russian colleagues is that they too need to recognize the reality of the situation on the ground and that we cannot go on simply allowing this to happen and the Security Council especially is a place where these issues need to be taken forward, and I really do hope that in the course of the next few days the international community can come together on this.
And we have touched too on the issues of Iran. Again very high on my agenda as we again reach out to the Iranians to say that our objective is to bring them to the negotiating table to find a resolution to the issues of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and our capacity to be able to support their peaceful use of nuclear power. I again ask that they seriously consider the options that have been put on the table at our meeting in Istanbul to do this.

Finally I wanted to just say how much we value the work that we do together on human rights. Mexico plays a very important role on the international stage and it is a great pleasure to work in collaboration with you Minister and with your colleagues on this issue. Human rights are a challenge that we have to be able to address all in our own countries. It is true for the 27 Member States of the European Union, it is true for Mexico. I believe that there is huge commitment of the government to do that and I wish them well. It's important to tackle any abuses of human rights wherever they may be.

And as I began, it's an enormous privilege to be here today.