Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
at the end of her visit to Burma/Myanmar

I am extremely satisfied with my visit to Burma/Myanmar. I came here to recognize that all our sanctions with the exception of the arms embargo have been suspended, to open our Office in Yangon and to meet with the political leadership, the President and senior ministers to discuss the future of this country. I was extremely pleased to hear all of them talk about future reforms, the need to continue the journey they have started and the support they would welcome from the European Union.

We have been talking about specifics while I have been here. We are very keen to support the rural community. The President has the ambition to reduce poverty in line with the Millennium Development Goals in the next two years. We want to be a part of these efforts. He talked about education and health, the need to develop small businesses, which will be the backbone of the economy, and the opportunity to get investment from European companies.

We have already allocated 150 million euros for the period 2012-2013. These will be additional resources we will be able to use for the different programmes the President has indicated. And we also want to engage our Member States. Many of them have experience with change and how bumpy the road can be when you move from oppression to democracy. We also know how to support the work of the parliament and the ways in which parliamentarians can be in touch.

The speaker of the parliament also told me that he wanted to work with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in all areas, including constitutional change, so I am happy that the question of the oath has been resolved. We have a lot to do and a clear idea of what kind of programmes will make a difference.
I had the privilege to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to visit the headquarters of the National League for Democracy, who were so successful in the by elections. I talked to not only those who have great experience in politics here, but also to those who are now coming through, wanting to be candidates, parliamentarians, wanting to engage in political life. The message from them was for us to support the reforms and to urge the government to move forward with more and faster reforms. And for the political prisoners I had the privilege of meeting and listening to their stories - of the very difficult life they have had over the last years - the message is one of engagement with their country. They ask us to support them so they are not just released but also rehabilitated.

In a long discussion with the President, we talked about a range of things, from economic development and growth to the significance of the changes. He also raised human rights and when I asked him about political prisoners, he said they will continue to look further at who should be released and how quickly. And I made the argument that it is not just about the release, but also to enable them to become full citizens of this country in the future.

The words 'irreversible changes' have been used in my talks here by the ministers and I am confident that this is their intention. Now we have to help them so that this is what they do. The EU has made its commitments to help them move forward and let's hope we can do this as quickly as possible.