Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
at the end of her South East Asia visit,
Bangkok, Thailand, 1 May 2012.

First of all I’ve had a very good and useful meeting with Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and
Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul of Thailand. It was extremely good to have the
opportunity to discuss the strengthening and deepening of our relationship with Thailand. As you
know, we want to complete the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and we have already started
the scoping exercise towards a Free Trade Agreement. I think these are important demonstrations of
the significance we attach to our relationship with Thailand.

It was my chance as well to welcome how well Thailand has recovered from the devastating floods
of last year. I was very pleased to hear that economic growth is predicted to be between 5.5% and
6.5%. And I took the opportunity to wish the people of Thailand well as you move forward, having
had such devastating floods last year.

We also talked about ASEAN and the meeting of foreign ministers which I jointly chaired in
Brunei, where the theme was: how do we strengthen our cooperation? And in that discussion we
had looked at issues including economic challenges, the opportunity to work together to deepen our
economic relationship, and also how we can collaborate on issues, for example how we tackle crisis
management, both between the European Union and also individual ASEAN countries and ASEAN
as a group. And over the coming months I will return to this region in order to strengthen and
deepen those relationships even further.

Of course I visited Burma/Myanmar, as you know. I describe this country as being on a journey; a
journey that they have begun but not yet finished. The words irreversible reforms were used by my
interlocutors, and I think these are the most important words of all because what we want to see are
reforms and changes that become irreversible.
I was particularly keen to meet and to spend some time with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and I am delighted that her party has been able to find a way to come to parliament. I had the opportunity with her to visit the NLD headquarters and to meet some of the new parliamentarians, especially young people who are entering parliament. I am always pleased to meet young people who are engaged in politics, anywhere in the world. They are the next generation of leaders and it was very good to meet with them.

I also met of course with the President. I took the opportunity to congratulate him on the progress that had been made. We talked about a whole range of issues: perhaps if I focus on two or three.

First of all, the importance of moving from ceasefire to lasting peace, the end of ethnic conflicts and the future of the country where all can belong and move forward together.

Secondly, the importance of not only releasing all the political prisoners, but making sure that they too can participate fully in the life of the country. And I met with some of those who had been released.

And then thirdly, the economic development and growth of the county: how do we support local communities, how do we help the infrastructure of the country to develop so that people can benefit from that. As you know I went at a time when we have suspended all our sanctions, apart from the arms embargo.

I was delighted to be able to be in the country at that point and I also had the opportunity to open in Yangon the European Union office. I did so with the deputy minister and with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. That was a symbol of the relationship that we wish to establish between that country and the European Union: to demonstrate not only our commitment now but also the long term commitment that we wish to give to the country. A country, as I said, that is on a journey that we wish to be a partner with, as they continue that journey towards political and economic change and reform.

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