Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting with President Morsi

Can I just say what a great pleasure and privilege it is to be here in Cairo on the eve of Ramadan. So can I begin by wishing all Egyptians a blessed month – Ramadan Karim. This morning I had the pleasure of meeting with a number of women, some of whom I met in my many visits here last year. And I was particularly pleased to be able to announce a further four million Euros to add to the seven million Euros already given in support of women’s projects here. Women have played such an important part in the transition of this country and will continue to do so in the future and I wish them all well.

I just had the pleasure of meeting President Morsi for the first time and I told him how much we were looking forward to engaging with the President and his executive over the months and years to come. We talked about the principles of democracy and the importance of inclusivity. I said that these presidential elections were a major milestone in Egypt's transition to democracy. The European Union and the European people wholeheartedly support the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government in Egypt.

But as we know, democracy and freedom are built from within, not imported from abroad. So to be clear, the European Union wants to help Egypt build the kind of democracy that meets the aspirations of all Egyptians. We are keen to help, but only the Egyptian people can do it. It is what I call 'Deep Democracy': not just organising one election, but building institutions and ensuring people's rights – freedom of expression, freedom of religion and respect for minorities.

And of course, as the President acknowledges, there is much to do. We want to see an inclusive solution to the current parliamentary crisis and to see priority given to appointing a civilian and democratically legitimate government and putting in place a transparent constitutional framework.

Egypt is so important as our neighbour and such a key player in the Arab world. We talked about the terrible situation in Syria and the aspirations of the people of Palestine for a two-state solution. Finally, I just want to say that we recognize in the European Union that there are many challenges ahead but we will stand by Egypt and the Egyptian people in their quest for deep democracy and economic opportunity.