Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton at a press conference with Moroccan Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Saad Eddine El Othmani

Monsieur le Ministre, c'est un plaisir d'être ici avec vous.

It is my first visit Minister, and it's really important to me to be here with you.

I come to say how important the relationship is between the European Union and Morocco.

I come to congratulate you on the reforms that you have made.

I am here because we attach great importance to our relations with you.

I wanted to talk about two different things while I was here. The first is the importance we attach to the bilateral relationship between us. It is not easy to achieve the depth of the relationship that Morocco has achieved with the European Union. Those who have been involved in negotiations with us on the advanced status will tell you that. But I believe that gives us a real opportunity to strengthen our economic and political ties. And that would be beneficial to the people of Morocco and to the people of the European Union.

I also wanted to come to engage with the Minister on the issues that concern us in the region. We continue to think of the on-going, terrible situation in Syria and we want to work together to try and support the people of Syria; recognising the importance of the opposition coming together, recognising the importance of continuing our efforts in New York to bring the International community together, supporting the neighbours who are directly affected, continuing our humanitarian support and being ready to support the people well into the future. It was very important to meet you, to have the opportunity to have a lengthy exchange on this issue.
I also wanted, of course, to talk about the situation in the Sahel. To have the benefit of listening to the Minister discuss these issues with me and to be able to exchange views on how best we can support the people of the region. Minister, you and I agree on the scale of the challenges that are facing the people of the Sahel and the importance of working together to try and find solutions.

I should say finally that the Minister and I have the opportunity, in different places, to talk about many issues and I value very much these opportunities. So again, Mr Minister, thank you so much for this opportunity to come on what is far too brief a visit. But the visit, nonetheless, will enable us to develop our relationship further.