Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the elections in Sierra Leone

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, made the following statement, following the elections in Sierra Leone on 17 November, 2012:

"I welcome the peaceful conduct of voting of 17 November in Sierra Leone which marks a further step in the consolidation of democracy in the country. I would like to commend the voters of Sierra Leone for their commitment to peace and democracy through active participation in elections and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for its capacity to effectively organize presidential, legislative and local council elections simultaneously.

I take note of the EU Election Observation Mission preliminary assessment that the electoral process so far has been well-conducted. A number of shortcomings have been identified such as: the misuse of incumbency, insufficient voter education and failure to enhance women's participation as candidates. These need to be addressed in line with the recommendations from international and domestic election observation missions.

As a close and long-standing partner, the EU looks forward to continue its strong partnership with Sierra Leone with the aim of supporting the country's social, economic and democratic development."

The High Representative thanked the Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission in Sierra Leone, Mr Richard Howitt MEP, as well as his team of 100 observers from the EU member states and Norway, for the important work they have undertaken. The presence of a delegation of European MEPs, led by Ms Mariya Gabriel, was particularly welcome.