Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit to Uzbekistan

"I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to visit Uzbekistan, one of the European Union's partners in Central Asia.

I just met with President Karimov, together with the Foreign Minister. We had an interesting discussion on the different aspects of our relations.

We discussed regional challenges, in particular the developments in Afghanistan.

We also talked about the issue of water management which is crucial for all Central Asian countries. I stressed the importance of regional co-operation to reach sustainable and long-term solutions. The European Union is ready to provide support for mutually beneficial solutions to water disputes.

I also encouraged the President to continue with political and economic reforms that are essential for the long-term development and prosperity of Uzbekistan. In particular I raised the issue of judicial reform and the increasingly important role that civil society needs to play.

I also had a really good meeting with representatives of Uzbek civil society. Civil society - including human rights defenders - forms an important aspect in every reform process and they should be promoted.

I also stressed the need to continue with the liberalization of the economy.

Please also see: Statement by Catherine ASHTON, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the EC following her visit to Uzbekistan