 Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting with UN Special Envoy for the Sahel R. Prodi, Brussels, 4 December 2012

I was delighted to meet with Mr Prodi in his new capacity as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's Special Envoy for the Sahel.

Mr Prodi's appointment came at a critical time for the Sahel. The international community's engagement in the region has never been more important.

The Sahel is suffering not only a humanitarian crisis of food safety but the fallout from events in Mali, which put a risk the region's security.

It is therefore essential that the international community helps the people of Mali find a lasting solution to the crisis facing their country. This will require a coherent and comprehensive approach, linking the promotion of governance, security and development at local, national and regional levels.

Two things are essential: the restoration of credible State Institutions and the establishment of a credible framework for South-North negotiations, in line with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions with the objective of achieving reunification and lasting peace.

Our proposal to support the training and restructuring of the Malian army will help contribute to this.

The UN, African Union and ECOWAS all have crucial roles to play in achieving these goals. The EU will work closely with all of them. Mr Prodi's role will be particularly important to ensure we work together coherently and I look forward to working with him in the months ahead.