Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton
to the DEVE Committee of the European Parliament, 28 May 2013

Thank you very much! It's a great pleasure to be here at the Committee and to see you again, Madame Joly, and to thank you and congratulate the Committee on all the work that you have been doing. I know we have today in the room some young leaders from Sudan. May I say what a great privilege it is to have you here for this part of our discussions. I hope you're having a wonderful trip here and enjoying and, I hope, gaining many things from this visit.

I wanted to spend a little time debriefing you on the Council meeting of this morning. As I promised to this Committee and indeed to Member States, we now do have a dedicated day for the Council in Development formation. It took me a while to negotiate that but we've done it.

The focus of our discussions at the Council today was on the Post-2015 agenda and the implementation of Agenda for Change. I believe Andris Piebalgs has been here already today and said quite a lot about both topics, but I wanted to just say a few words about our discussions. I invited UN Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson to lunch to discuss with us the Post-2015 agenda, Myanmar/Burma and Afghanistan.

I begin by thinking about what happens post-2015: what follows from the Millennium Development Goals when they expire in 2015 and what the follow-up to the Rio+20 will be. There is still a lot of work to do to help our partners achieve the MDGs. We need now to prepare ourselves for what happens next.

The Council today endorsed Conclusions on the developments of an overarching Post-2015 framework that will keep the European Union united around one coherent set of priorities and a single framework. Not an easy negotiation, but I think a real triumph for us in terms of keeping that coherence. And I pay tribute to Andris and his team and the EEAS for all the work they've done together to achieve this.

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It has been a key priority for us and I am pleased that we have achieved it. We have said that it has to be global and universal – addressing global challenges, with roles and responsibilities for all countries, including emerging economies, while of course respecting the different contexts. We've said that democratic governance, human rights, the rule of law should be key guiding principles. And that peace and security is crucially important as a precondition to sustainable development.

Now, we don't take for granted that our views are shared by everyone in this process. Parliament's input and support on this issue will be essential – and we're very much looking forward to the report of Mr Kaczmarek, very soon, I hope.

The other discussion item we had at the Council was Agenda for Change and an update on the implementation and the progress with programming of financial instruments for the period 2014 to 2020. Both Andris and I believe that the Council and the European Parliament should be treated exactly the same in this exercise. And that is why we have shared with you, ahead of this meeting, a note which gives you an update on the state of play.

As you know, the purpose is to give development policy a clear steer: to help us to be strategic, comprehensive and coherent maximising our impact and the results of what we do. And recognising, as I've said earlier, that sustainable development cannot be achieved alongside war and conflict, and our cooperation must address issues relating to peace and security.

We have made much faster progress than we thought we would on Joint Programming and this will be now in place in around 20 countries by 2014. We expect that within the next four years it will be launched in over 40 partner countries.

I am very grateful to the Member States who supported Joint Programming from their capitals and through their Embassies in the field. A good example has been Ethiopia where the EU Head of Delegation worked very closely with 13 Member State Ambassadors who signed a Joint Cooperation Strategy with the government and put in place Joint Programming in 2015. I want to pay tribute to that Head of Delegation, Xavier Marchal, who, many of you know, died a few days ago and his funeral will take place this weekend. He was an extraordinary advocate of the work we do in Africa. He worked incredibly hard and I do pay tribute to him and express my sorrows to his family and I am sure on behalf of everyone here.

I do want to thank this Committee for all your support. It is not easy to sell Joint Programming - the recent meeting that this Committee held with national parliamentarians on Joint Programming and on Policy Coherency on Development reflect exactly kind of approach that we need.

We also concluded the 11th EDF, the Internal Agreement with the exact amounts and breakdowns for each Member State's contribution. I thanked Ministers for remaining committed to development cooperation and for making available more than €30.5 billion. I know finding money is not easy in these present times.

But I know how much importance you and I attach to the 0.7 Official Development Aid target, and I really do share your concerns about where we are compared to where we should be. The recent data that the OECD published shows that despite the crisis, the EU remains the biggest donor in the world, but also that taken together, in 2012 we collectively decreased aid.

So I have asked Ministers, as I regularly do, to do their best to live up to the EU's commitments. It makes a huge difference in the poorest countries but also it supports our role in leadership and our credibility in what we do.
In the longer term, I think we're going to have to look at how we mobilise even more financing from other sources, public, private, domestic, international, and to use aid as a catalyst, in new and innovative ways. I would be very interested in your view on that in what we call blending. We will be coming back to this in the autumn in the Development FAC.

And finally just a few words on Afghanistan and Burma/Myanmar which we talked about today. Madame Joly, you have been very engaged in the situation Afghanistan, and you and I know that the coming months will see the beginning of what you might call the final phase of transition. We have to really take the emphasis now on development. We have already agreed between the EU and Member States to at least maintain assistance at 200 million euros a year, that's part of an overall package of about 1 billion euros. I personally believe we need to frame a 10 year EU strategy for Afghanistan.

The support will help them face the challenges that lie ahead, will help them build the institutions that Deputy Secretary General Eliasson was talking about very much today to ensure that we do have the rule of law and institutions functioning well. And again we need to think about the coordination we need in Afghanistan. We need to ensure that girls stay in school, that we have an effective work on justice, on human rights and on rooting out corruption. Without doing all that our aid will not be well spent, so we have to do all of this together.

And as I have mentioned Burma/Myanmar, we finally lifted all sanctions; there is a transition in place. But you know very well that there's much that needs to be done: human rights, democracy, fighting poverty, and achieving a lasting peace. To deal with some of the tensions and violence that we have seen and to ensure that all people feel part of that society. I know that change in attitudes is not going to be easy but we do need to continue work hard to try and achieve this.

We have doubled aid for 2012-2013 to €150 million. I hope that we will maintain high levels of assistance and as you may have heard, I will be leading a Task Force in November which will bring together the support of international financial organizations, the EU institutions, Members of the European Parliament, and the business community to try and offer economic and political support to that country in transition. Plans we've done before in countries in our neighbourhood but now try out in other places.

Madame Joly, I could go on to many other areas but I will stop there because I do want to take as many questions as possible. Thank you.