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Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the start of the genocide in Rwanda

The European Union joins the Republic of Rwanda and the people of Rwanda in solemn commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the genocide of 1994 and of the horror inflicted upon more than 800,000 defenceless men, women and children who perished in one of the most brutal and systematic atrocities in history. We must never forget our collective failure to protect the victims.

The EU pays tribute to the strength and determination of the people of Rwanda who have rebuilt their lives and their country against enormous odds. We salute the efforts made to achieve national reconciliation and to secure justice as the new foundations of the Rwandan nation. These efforts must continue and must be recognised and supported by the international community.

The Great Lakes region which has suffered for too long from conflict should benefit from the lessons of this reconciliation process. The European Union considers Rwanda essential for the stability of the region. The commemoration should be a time of remembrance but also a time to draw lessons and look at the future, not only for Rwanda but also for the region as a whole.
The European Union is committed to promoting core values of human dignity, rule of law and respect for human rights. Since its inception, the EU has endorsed the principle of Responsibility to Protect, adopted by the World Summit in 2005. The EU works within the international community, as well as in partnership with local institutions, citizens and communities, to strengthen the collective ability to prevent and respond decisively to mass atrocities and genocide.

Close attention to early warning signs and to timely and effective prevention of conflict, and sustained efforts to end hatred, intolerance and tyranny are all required if we are never again to allow crimes of such magnitude to occur.

We must avoid any group becoming a common target, and we must end impunity of those responsible for atrocities. In this respect we want to pay tribute to the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Furthermore, a number of landmark verdicts in national courts within the EU against those responsible for acts of genocide in Rwanda are testimony to the supremacy of justice in pursuing perpetrators of the tragedy of 1994, from which Rwanda has gradually but purposefully recovered.

The European Union renews at this occasion its commitment to the people of Rwanda and pledges continued support to national reconciliation, justice and sustainable development.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Iceland†, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
† Iceland continues to be a member of EFTA and of the European Economic Area.