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R E M A R K S

Introductory remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton at the conference: A New Deal for Somalia

"Can I begin by saying: welcome to Brussels!"

It is a great honour to be hosting this extremely important meeting. I want to express my gratitude to the Belgian Government for making the Palais d'Egmont – where you are now – available to us. It is a long way from Somalia and is where our minds are focused right now.

I remember very well, Mr President, visiting Mogadishu and witnessing the end of the mandate of the transitional federal institutions and seeing what came next, which was a peaceful transfer of power to the new institutions. The torch of leadership was passed to you, Mr President, with all the challenges, the hopes and the aspirations of the Somali people.

I don't have to tell anyone here how important it is that we recognise the progress that has been achieved since then. Somalia has, with the help of its partners, got on to a better footing towards a brighter future.

I want to pay tribute on behalf of everyone here to you, Mr President, and to the people of Somalia who have made great sacrifices in order to break out of the cycle of violence and instability. But as you have always said, many challenges lie ahead. And that is the reason why we are all here in Brussels today, to reinforce the mutual commitment of the Somali authorities, the Somali people and the international community to continue on the long walk towards peace, stability and economic revival.

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When I began this job four years ago, Somalia was one of the first places that I focused on. It's very obvious we needed a cohesive and coherent approach, if we were going to help the Somali people to realize their ambitions. Since then we have brought the full support of the European Union to Somalia and to the wider region. I am very proud that the European Union has stood with Somalia for the past twenty years. And I want to assure the Somali people that we will stand with them for the future.

When you and I, Mr President, agreed to hold this conference in Brussels, when we sat together in January and worked this out, we wanted to build on the progress that has been made to translate our long partnership into a framework for the future. Not just for us, but for the international community at large. So, the Compact that we will endorse today stands for consultation and outreach across Somalia, so that the country can again become more than a collection of localities and regions but a Federal state and a nation.

It makes clear to all that their mutual responsibility is to work for the same objectives and cooperate together to achieve them. It marks, in other words, the beginning of a long road. But we know better where we are going, and we know the things that we have to do to get there.

I don't underestimate the many challenges that lie ahead. You, Mr President, have always understood how complex and challenging this would be. And this Compact on its own will not resolve everything. But it gives us a plan, it gives a set of commitments that will enable us to be focused on what we do. And if our commitment is firm, we cannot fail, and for the sake of the people of Somalia, we must not fail.

Mr President, Honourable guests, it is wonderful to have so many people here with us today. I am especially delighted that President Van Rompuy has been able to join us for part of this session. I know only too well his commitment in support of the European Union's work, in Somalia and in the region.

And I will, if I may, invite you Mr President to welcome everyone and to make a contribution."
