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S T A T E M E N T

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the preparation for general elections in Bangladesh

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

"Following the announcement of the general elections in Bangladesh on 5 January 2014, the EU remains concerned that there is still confrontation between the major political groups in the country on the composition of the government during the electoral period. The EU calls on the leaders of all political parties to agree on a mutually acceptable formula so as to facilitate the holding of elections which fully reflect the wishes of the people. It welcomes the efforts of those who have been working to achieve this.

We urge political leaders to refrain from any actions that could spark further violence. The EU remains concerned about intimidation and confrontation in the form of 'hartals' (political strikes) and about the arrest of politicians and human rights defenders. The EU urges Bangladesh to respect human rights and democratic principles, and to ensure full respect for the rights of detainees. Civil society groups must be able to play their fundamental role in the maintenance of democratic freedoms.

The EU is ready to consider sending election observers as it did in 2008. However, this depends on the political and security situation in Bangladesh. Ending violence and finding a political solution through dialogue are essential to allow a peaceful, inclusive, transparent and credible election to take place. This can only happen if all sides can agree to move ahead, in the interests of the country's future."

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