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Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the European Union-League of Arab States Ministerial Meeting

Can I thank you for hosting what I think it has been a very productive meeting. I believe that strengthening the relationship between the League of Arab States and the EU is absolutely vital given the historic changes we are living through, particularly but not only across the Arab world. These changes give us real opportunities but also represent great challenges that we need to work on and face together.

Regional challenges of course include the tragic situation in Syria and we believe that that requires a regional approach and regional solutions.

We must work together to try and help and support the people living through this terrible tragedy. We can only deal effectively with these issues if we keep up a close dialogue, if we work to find the right kind of responses and if we look for common solutions.

This is why we are so committed to this partnership.

Today we have had a very open debate focusing largely on the tragic situation in Syria and on the Middle East Peace Process.

I was extremely pleased that we were joined by the Joint Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who briefed us on the latest developments in the Syrian crisis.

We have also looked into bilateral cooperation in many areas, which I will come back to in more detail in a moment.

P R E S S

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But I think that today's discussions have achieved several tangible results:

- We have the Joint Declaration which reflects our willingness to work together, and calls upon us to meet again formally in 2014. There will be many meetings between myself and the Secretary General and others between now and then

- The Joint Working Programme includes specific steps we will take to develop our cooperation in many areas, including enhancing women's contribution to society, electoral observation, human rights, legal cooperation, diplomatic training, cultural cooperation, humanitarian aid and renewable energy.

I also think that the inauguration of the Crisis Room which we just completed shows in practice how productive our relationship is and will be as we are better able to deal with each crisis together.

So, I look forward to our continued work to address the changes in this region, to work together in our commitment to human and political rights.

And again as I began enormous thanks to the LAS who have been hosting today's meeting which I believe has been extremely productive.