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**Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton after the first
meeting of the EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue,
Islamabad, 5th June 2012**

Can I begin by saying that it is truly a great honour to be here in Pakistan for my first official visit.

It's a great pleasure to be here and especially to be working with Minister Khar. You just heard from her what we've achieved, but also her ambition for this relationship. And I know, in all her international work on behalf of the people of Pakistan, how much she seeks to achieve for this country.

I am also very well aware of the challenges that Pakistan faces and the sacrifices that have been made.

As you said Minister, so many people have lost their lives, so many have been injured and so many families have been devastated by what has happened in this country, both in terms of terrorist activity, but also in the terrible floods.

So it is a great pleasure that I am here today in a very positive moment to be able to launch the Strategic Dialogue and the Engagement Plan. This is a 5 year plan deliberately designed to cover a whole range of issues and areas where Pakistan and the EU can work together, collaborate and establish stronger and deeper relationships that will help us to engage on some of the important issues for this country but also important issues that concern us all.

I think the discussions that we just had were excellent. I believe we have covered an incredible amount of ground in a short time, but also established the dialogue that will continue throughout the years, through seniors officials' meetings, and through our exchanges which can encompass so many different issues.

P R E S S

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I want to say again that for the EU there was a real focus on our support for this country. I was reflecting again on what happened after the floods and the humanitarian assistance that came from the EU and its Member States. We gave 423 million euros and I mention that figure because it is a big figure deliberately put together to show how much we care about what is happening in this country. We are the largest humanitarian donor in Pakistan. We are very proud of that fact because we believe it is important to recognize that the development of this country is good for the people of this country, and the role of Pakistan in the region is good for all the people of the region. I hope that the engagement plan will enable us to complete a well-rounded relationship. Our relationship in the past was built on development and built on trade. Our strategic dialogue enables us to talk not just about those issues, but also to bring the political and security issues more to the forefront.

You and I Minister are engaged not just in our bilateral relationship but across the world we meet in all sorts of places. We discuss global issues and again I am absolutely certain that there is more that we can do together and that our voices can make a difference on some of the issues that are being faced right now in different parts of the world.

But coming back to this relationship, we want to work for the long term. We want to support your economy, to consolidate your democracy and to play a constructive role with you in this region. I often talk about politics meets economics. It is so important to help support people in this country to get the education they want, the employment they want, for communities to develop, for energy needs to be met. And alongside that I believe it helps to build and consolidate strong democracy.

You have elections next year and we will support in those elections. It's about building the institutions that help economic growth and help consolidate that real democracy. We do recognize the challenges this country faces and that is the reason that I am here. But it is also the reason that it is not the first time you and I have met and I was very proud to host the Friends of Democratic Pakistan meeting in Brussels, very proud that we have already had serious engagement at presidential level and today. I was extremely pleased to have the honour to meet with the Prime Minister.

So more than anything my presence is to herald the 5 years ahead and to demonstrate how important we believe this country is, to pay tribute to the work that is going on, to support and help the people of Pakistan and to acknowledge the sacrifices that have been made. And, more than anything, to show that the European Union is not only a partner for now, but that it will continue to be a strong and reliable partner in the future.
