

**Remarks by
Catherine Ashton
at the
International Afghanistan Conference, Bonn 2011**

I'd like to thank Germany for the extraordinary work to bring this conference together and the people of Bonn for welcoming us all in this wonderful town.

President Karzai, we are here to support your country and your people to ensure that they can take more and more control of their own lives.

I believe that the rebuilding and the development of your country has been and still is a collective effort. It is not therefore surprising to see so many countries and organizations present today.

I also want to pay a special tribute today to the United Nations and to the Secretary General and his team for the work that they have done.

In the 10 years since the first Bonn conference, the efforts and investment that have been made have been significant, including real sacrifices, but a great deal has been achieved in health and education and in building the institutions.

And as Chancellor Merkel remarked this morning, following the latest transfers, close to half of the Afghan population now live under Afghan security control.

Like many, I've been extremely impressed by the role of the women of Afghanistan. Not least under the leadership of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who's worked tirelessly for women's rights everywhere but especially with Afghan women.

I had the great pleasure to meet them again this morning. Their message was very clear: help us to preserve what we've achieved in very difficult circumstances and to build further on those achievements. I can assure you, Mr. President, that we will continue to support them.

I speak on behalf of not just the 27 EU countries but also the European Commission: we work as a team with you and with our international partners. The future of Afghanistan matters to us. Total EU civilian assistance is about 1 billion Euros a year, from the institutions and our member states. We focus especially on governance, rural development needs and the police. We don't just send money: EUPOL has been supporting the build up of civilian police and we've trained over 3000 officers.

Our key message to you, Mr. President, is that we will stay engaged. We will confirm today that we will maintain funding at least at current levels and we will also confirm today that EUPOL will stay.

We want to build that long-term partnership with Afghanistan. That's why we will launch negotiations on a cooperation agreement, on partnership and development, to cover all areas in which we want to collaborate and offer support.

I guarantee those commitments to you, Mr. President. But of course this is about credible mutual commitments, about mutual accountability. So I know that you will continue to work to ensure governance and justice are improved to tackle corruption, to improve the electoral system, to ensure transparency and public finances and advance the rights of women.

Doing so is the right thing for Afghanistan, but it will also help to strengthen the support and friendship of so many in Europe and around the world.

We know too that there is no lasting stability without regional cooperation, so we are supporting the regional cooperation centre in your Foreign Ministry to coordinate from an Afghan perspective the different regional projects and programmes.

Let me end by recalling my first conference on Afghanistan in January 2010. A Minister said that ordinary Afghans aspire to the modest miracle of a normal life. Mr. President, that's still the goal, the modest miracle of a normal life. And we will continue to support you so that your people may find that.