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## Speech by HR Catherine Ashton on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country which demonstrates that the EU's engagement must be long term if it is productive, and where – over time – we are making a difference. I will focus my remarks on two issues: democratic follow-up after the November 2011 elections and the security and humanitarian situation in eastern Congo.

DRC is a fragile state and a young democracy. It is still recovering from years of war and deprivation. The road to recovery and stabilisation is not straight-forward, but the EU is determined to persevere in supporting the DRC in consolidating its democracy and accelerating its development.

The 2006 elections marked a milestone in the DRC's progress towards a more democratic future, but were achieved with huge support from the international community. The 2011 elections, by contrast, were primarily funded and organised by the DRC itself. The challenges remained great; the execution may not have been perfect; but this is an achievement we should recognise. The EU continued to provide support for the electoral process through a contribution of up to 47.5 M€ and by sending an EU Electoral Observation Mission.

I shall take this opportunity to pay tribute to the commitment and hard work of the EU Electoral Observation Mission led by Honourable Member Mariya Nedelcheva which carried out its work in very difficult circumstances. Its final report (which has been well received by all political actors in DRC), highlighted the fact that the scale of irregularities and fraud weakened, if not undermined, the credibility of the outcome, and that significant reforms and improvements were essential for the future.

Nevertheless, in present circumstances, all stakeholders have recognized that it would be impossible to recount the votes or organise a new round of elections.

**P R E S S**

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Our priority is therefore to follow-up the valuable recommendations for future reforms in the Observation Mission's report. These will be an important element of the dialogue between the EU and the DRC government. In the short term, we expect to see significant improvements for the provincial and local elections to be organized in the coming years.

In the immediate future, therefore, the EU will engage more closely with the new DRC government to improve the democratic process and strengthen the country's governance.

I am encouraged by the recent appointment of Mr. Ponyo Matata as Prime Minister and the new ministers that will work with him. Mr. Matata has worked closely with the EU in the past and has a good record as Finance Minister of the previous DRC government and as National Authorising Officer of the European Development Fund. The commitments he made in his inaugural speech to the national assembly are encouraging and open renewed prospects for political dialogue and progress in improved governance.

Our Head of Delegation has already met several Ministers of the new government and is beginning to work closely with them. Initial impressions are positive. But this must be proven by actions, not just commitments.

We have at our disposal significant sums for development assistance which we are keen to use. Our commitment is to ensure these are used as productively as possible to meet the challenges of the future.

Secondly, over the past three years, the situation in the eastern Congo has improved. But it remains extremely fragile and, as recent events have highlighted, there remains a risk of it sliding back into war and disorder. Our priority is to work with international partners and with the governments of the region to prevent this happening.

The mutiny by some elements in the Congolese Armed Forces – effectively former rebels returning to the bush – has caused renewed fighting in the Kivus. I am appalled by, and strongly condemn, the recent mass killings by several armed groups.

One consequence has been a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced people in the last few months, the total now exceeding 2 million people. EU humanitarian assistance already amounts to €63 million in 2012, and clearly the humanitarian crisis is not over.

The EU is committed to the unity and sovereignty of DRC. I condemn the rebellion and strongly support the restoration of the authority of the State in eastern Congo. This, of course, needs to take account of the legitimate security concerns of DRC's immediate neighbours.

In this context, I am worried about recent reports by the UN mission in DRC about external support to this rebellion. If confirmed, these developments would put at risk the positive regional dynamics between DRC and Rwanda, and weaken their cooperation which has helped underpin progress in the eastern Congo in recent years. Clear messages have been passed to all stakeholders in order to encourage a constructive approach in the current circumstances. The EU recalls the need for all illegal armed groups to lay down their weapons and avoid further violence.

Regional cooperation is essential for tackling a number of the problems of the Great Lakes region, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources ("conflict minerals") and the provision of improved energy supplies for all.

We support the activities of MONUSCO in DRC and welcomes the renewal of its mandate at the end of June. Protection of civilians in eastern Congo will remain an important mission for MONUSCO in the coming years.

But there will be no sustainable peace in Congo without the rule of law and the application of justice. This is why I welcome and support the arrest warrant launched by the prosecutor against Gen. Bosco Ntaganda. This is a clear sign that impunity will not prevail and provides hope for the people who are suffering at the hands of armed groups.

Our contribution to the reconstruction of the judicial system is also an integral part of the wider campaign against gender-based violence in the DRC. Everyone must know that such crimes can and will be punished. But our programmes aim equally to tackle the root causes as well as the symptoms of this problem.

The EU has supported action to keep the DRC on the agenda of the Human Rights Council and encourage the Government to cooperate with the Council.

Security Sector Reform also continues to be crucial. We are contributing through the operation of two missions – EUSEC supporting military re-structuring and EUPOL helping reform of the police. I look forward to continuing to contribute to it through the most appropriate instruments, taking into account the UN peace keeping mission's (MONUSCO's) future mandate. But the Security Sector Reform will only be a success with the sustained commitment of DRC's authorities at all levels.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that the EU is committed for the long-term to support the DRC and the Great Lakes region to escape from the conflicts of the past and build a sustainable, more prosperous and more peaceful future. It is the people of the DRC we are determined to help, and to do so through a comprehensive approach that tackles the many inter-linked problems they face. We will persevere.

## **Closing remarks by HR Catherine Ashton on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Thank you very much Mr President, and thank you to all those who participated in this debate. The fundamental problem in the DRC, as many honourable members have identified, is governance, and of course we cannot ignore what happened in the last elections. So we have to build what I would describe as a more contractual relationship with the new government in Kinshasa. That means also we need stronger political dialogue that should be necessary to guide that cooperation.

We also need to keep very clearly in mind the humanitarian and security situation in eastern Congo, and to continue to support the dialogue between DRC and Rwanda. The EU Declaration that was made a few days ago regarding the situation in eastern Congo is a clear sign that we want to continue to play a constructive role as a regional actor in the Great Lakes. I would remind honourable members too, of the statement that I made on behalf of the EU on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June. What I said then was that I was very worried by information that the dynamic between Rwanda and the DRC might be endangered. It is very important that everyone continues their cooperation and to make sure that there is real transparency so that anything that has been done can be investigated. On the possible support of Rwanda to the rebellion, we take very seriously what the United Nations report has said about support coming from across the border. So it is important to put an end to support mutinies may receive. And it is important too that everyone cooperates to investigate all of this.

I am absolutely convinced that we have to continue to monitor the human rights situation, including gender-based violence, of which honourable members have spoken. It has to be a priority for the European Union. That means too that we need to see regular political dialogue with the DRC authorities and also with civil society.

We've got to continue to strengthen the security sector reform so we can ensure that we strengthen the capacity of the state. And that means that we impact on crucial sectors. We have to end impunity, end the gender based violence, end the illegal exploitation of natural resources and support the building of governance.

I do appreciate the continuous support of the European Parliament and I pay tribute again to the electoral observation mission. But let me be clear that any future support to elections must depend on the credibility of the process, the implementation of recommendations that have been made by the mission, ownership by the government and a profound reform of the electoral system.

Thank you Mr President.

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