UNCLASSIFIED U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2014-20439 Doc No. C05784198 Date: 09/30/2015

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Sent: To: Subject: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov> Sunday, May 22, 2011 8:08 AM H Fw: EU's Ashton in east Libya offers rebels support (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker Sent: Sunday, May 22, 2011 07:49 AM To: NEWS-Mahogany Cc: SES-O\_OS; SES-O\_Shift-II Subject: EU's Ashton in east Libya offers rebels support (Reuters)

BENGHAZI, Libya, May 22 (Reuters) - European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton pledged support for rebels in east Libya on Sunday, making the most senior visit to the area by a foreign official since a revolt against Muammar Gaddafi began.

"I saw the posters on the way from the airport to here saying 'We have a dream' and I'm here today to explain not only about our short-term support but also the breadth of our support," Ashton said in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi.

Visiting to open a representative office for the EU, Ashton toured the square next to the Benghazi court house, epicentre of the revolt that erupted in mid-February.

Several Libyans surrounded her, flicking "V-for-Victory" signs. One man nearby said: "Every Libyan is very happy."

Ashton's visit "shows the increased support of the European Union in supporting us to have a democratic and free state", said the head of the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council, Mustafa Abdel Jalil.

"The Libyan people appreciate this visit and appreciate the European Union for supporting the revolution since its beginning," he added.

Ashton said she discussed support for health, education, civil society, border management and security reform.

"We seek to support, not just now, but for the future and as long as the people of this country wish us there," she said.

Western diplomatic sources told Reuters last week the EU was considering tightening sanctions on Gaddafi's government by blacklisting ports to prevent oil exports and fuel imports.

One source said EU experts had reached an agreement to put six ports -- Tripoli, Zuara, Zawiyah, Al-Khoms, Ras Lanuf and Brega -- on the list. Proposals could be submitted to the EU sanctions committee next week.

Another EU diplomat said the measure could be discussed by foreign ministers who meet in Brussels on Monday.

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