

Addis Ababa, January 31 (WIC) - The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, announced on yesterday plans for the EU to host a global conference in the autumn, aiming to "come up with a New Deal for Somalia that will help deliver political, security and development support".

Lady Ashton made the announcement during the two-day visit of the Somali President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, to the EU. Today, Thursday, President Mohamud meets with the EU's 27 foreign ministers before going on to London.

During her discussions with the President, Lady Ashton noted that the 95% drop in piracy off the Somalia coast and the beating back of Al-Shabaab insurgents over the last two years were indications that Somalia had come a long way. She announced "a new era" in ties between Somalia and the EU.

The European Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso, welcomed the agreement reached between Somalia and the EU "to enhance relations" and expressed the EU's belief that "there is a real commitment to go forward".

The EU President, Herman Van Rompuy, said President Mohamud's visit, his first to Europe, came as Somalia was on a "path to transforming and taking its rightful place in the community of nations".

President Mohamud said Somalia now needed to move from being a country "in relief" to one in recovery. Somalia could not do this alone and his Government needed the support of the whole international community. He said Somalia needed an engagement that looked like the Marshall Plan, the US-funded plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. The EU has provided nearly 600 million Euros to Somalia over the last five years in the areas of defense, diplomacy and development, and has trained some 3,000 Somali troops since 2010.

Last week it extended its training mission for another two years at a cost of around 11 million Euros. The EU's anti-piracy mission off the Somali coast, EUNAVFOR, has also been extended until December 2014.

