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Dear Ms Lucas,

Thank you for your letter dated 1 October 2008 related to Morocco. I would like to take this opportunity to explain where we stand on the issues of the 'advanced status' with Morocco and of cooperation in the field of human rights.

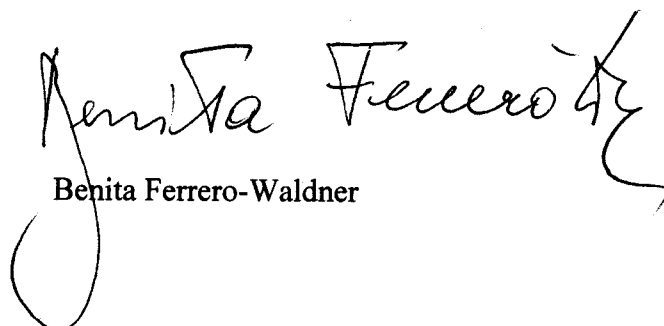
As you know, Morocco requested an 'advanced status' in its relations with the EU ever since the signature of the Association Agreement in 2000. On the occasion of the EU-Morocco Association Council of 23 July 2007, the EU expressed its willingness to launch a reflection process for deepening its relations with Morocco. An ad-hoc EU-Morocco working group has been created and tasked with preparing recommendations for strengthening cooperation and dialogue across all policy areas, including Human Rights and fundamental freedoms. This group will submit its proposals to the next EU-Morocco Association Council to be held in October 2008.

The upgrading of bilateral relations will take place in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, using the possibilities offered by the principle of differentiation. This means that all measures envisaged with Morocco could be eventually offered to those countries willing to strengthen relations with the EU, and on the basis of the satisfactory implementation of their Action Plans.

At the same time, the Commission follows very closely developments in relation to the Western Sahara and, in particular, human rights questions. Compliance with human rights principles is an essential element of the EU's relations with partner States like Morocco and it is one of the cornerstones of the Association Agreements between the EU and the Mediterranean countries. It is also a central element of the EU-Morocco Action Plan under the European Neighbourhood Policy. Therefore, human rights are permanently among the subjects discussed in the political dialogue with Morocco and, more specifically in the framework of the "Human rights" sub-committee. This sub-committee has already met twice and has allowed for discussion of all issues in a frank and open manner, including on aspects linked to Western Sahara.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that the Commission supports the efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations to try to find an acceptable political solution to the Western Sahara conflict.

Yours sincerely,


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