

Global Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees 2022

1st February 2022

Opening Remarks

Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General, World Customs Organization

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

1. The World Customs Organization is pleased to be part of this event and to contribute to the very important discussions on National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs).
2. We have taken part in the past forums as well, and are delighted to be joining hands with our partner organizations, once again.
3. Particularly I would like to thank UNCTAD for their leadership in organizing this Forum.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about severe disruption in international trade, which had a significant impact on the trade facilitation agenda overall.
5. Two years into the pandemic, we are witnessing major disruptions in the global supply chain, which affect most of the economies worldwide and are attributed to various and complex factors.

<E-Commerce>

6. One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is on cross-border e-commerce, where we experienced a tremendous growth in small and low value shipments, which has placed significant pressure on Customs administrations.
7. We are therefore investing efforts to support the Membership in implementing the WCO Framework of Standards on Cross-Border E-Commerce.
8. It covers areas such as the submission of advanced electronic data for efficient risk management and the establishment of trust-based partnerships with e-commerce stakeholders to cater for the new business models.
9. We are also investing efforts to ensure that the E-Commerce Framework of Standards and the associated Package of supporting tools are up-to-date and relevant.

<Recovery>

10. Trade facilitation plays a significant role in the recovery phase.
11. Through simplifying and standardizing border procedures and creating transparent and predictable conditions for trade, Customs administrations facilitate legitimate business that, in turn, increases economic growth and job opportunities.

12. The trade facilitation agenda also encourages the Customs community to play an important role in implementing the 2030 UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
13. Customs can foster increased diversity and reduced inequality by helping open up opportunities for marginalized communities, including women entrepreneurs and small traders, to access new markets, while improving the conditions and ensuring safety at the border.
14. We are fully aware of this important responsibility and now establishing the network of Gender Equality Diversity in the Customs community as part of our efforts.

<NTFC>

15. Last year we carried out a survey on NTFCs to take stock of the situation in this area, including the challenges and opportunities observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
16. Based on the results received, we published a Secretariat Note, which is publicly available on our web site.
17. What we have seen is that in many cases the pandemic inevitably impacted the functioning of NTFCs.
18. Many NTFCs have put their work on hold altogether, due to the inability to meet in person.
19. However, in some instances NTFCs played an important role in addressing facilitation priorities during the pandemic, and have benefited from the sense of urgency generated by this crisis.
20. They highlighted better communication and cooperation between the public and private sectors as one of the most important benefits.
21. The WCO therefore strongly advocates for private sector involvement in the NTFCs for a constructive dialogue to strengthen partnership with the private sector.
22. Their contribution to conducting the Time Release Studies, for example, is pertinent in identifying and addressing the bottlenecks at the border.
23. We also see their important role in advancing the work on Customs-Business partnership of Authorized Economic Operator programs that could pursue synergy with other public-private partnership arrangements by other government agencies.
24. We also have to be particularly mindful of the Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, who are especially vulnerable and their specific needs need to be considered.
25. The WCO's regional TFA workshops held in the past year discussed the role of the TFA in ensuring not only the swift cross-border movement of essential goods, but also in ensuring supply chain continuity.

- 26. An important lesson coming out of these discussions was the need to strengthen the role of the NTFCs, especially in implementing some of the most challenging provisions in the TFA, such as Single Window and Border Agency Cooperation.
- 27. Implementing the TFA, through the standards and tools provided by the international standard-setting community, including the WCO, can help tremendously in the recovery process.

<Digitalization>

- 28. Another important change that COVID-19 pandemic brought was the acceleration in digitalization and the more extensive use of electronic services in cross-border trade.
- 29. Now we need to make sure to keep that momentum going and contribute to the paperless trade agenda.
- 30. Here we see the importance of interoperability that supports single window solutions.
- 31. During the WCO Technology Conference held online last November, we invited the heads of relevant public and private international organizations.
- 32. They all stressed the importance of international standards in digitalization of trade procedures and strongly supported the role of WCO Data Model in enabling interoperability.

<Data>

- 33. Digital technology produces many data and as a result collecting, sharing and analyzing data has become a major prerequisite for Customs performance.
- 34. The WCO's theme of Year 2022 was set as "Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem".
- 35. We are currently developing the WCO Data Strategy to take advantage of the power of data that will empower Customs administrations to apply innovation to their border processes, contribute to evidence-based decisions and foster an open data society.

<Capacity building>

- 36. Through its Mercator Program for capacity building, the WCO remains committed to the TFA agenda and stands ready to support its developing and least developed country Members in trade facilitation implementation.
- 37. Our support is extended to regional integration, including the most recent African Continental Free Trade Zone, as any regional integration efforts should be based on the TFA and other international standards such as the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention to ensure connectivity at borders.
- 38. This includes support in stakeholder engagement and execution of forward looking projects through the NTFC structure.

39. I have confidence that the NTFC forums, such as the one held this week will inspire Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration amongst all parties in the NTFCs and will greatly contribute to the trade facilitation agenda in the short and long run.
40. I wish everyone a successful Global NTFC Forum 2022!
