



Message from the World Customs Organization

International Customs Day 2018

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Each year, the WCO Secretariat chooses a theme that is relevant to the international Customs community. The slogan chosen for 2018 is “A secure business environment for economic development.” Under this banner, Members of the WCO are encouraged to look at how they can create an environment for businesses that will foster their participation in cross-border trade, and, ultimately, how they can best serve the people and empower entrepreneurs.

By “secure,” we mean an environment that is enabling, safe, fair and sustainable, all wrapped into one. Such an environment will help businesses, especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), to expand their activities and create incentives for them to participate more fully in international trade, as well as encourage them to innovate, generate employment and invest in human resources, thereby boosting economic growth and raising living standards.

Not only is it important for governments to support specific interventions for businesses to flourish, it is equally important to look at the external environment in which businesses operate. Therefore, from a Customs perspective, I would like to take this opportunity to develop the idea of a “secure” business environment further, especially its key elements: “enabling,” “safe,” and “fair and sustainable.”

Evidence-based research, recognized internationally, clearly shows that Customs can contribute to making the business environment more “enabling,” or in other words, more stable and predictable by, for example, streamlining procedures, tackling corruption, enhancing integrity, and facilitating the cross-border movement of goods, conveyances and people in general.

Ensuring safety is also critical. Legitimate businesses require a secure supply chain to prosper, but some threats come from within the trade itself, such as the shipment of illicit goods that could endanger peoples’ health, safety and security. Combating cross-border crime, including the illicit funding of international terrorism through trade activities, is our responsibility, and one that Customs takes seriously in its efforts to ensure a “safe” environment.

Last, but not least, Customs must strive to build an environment that is “fair and sustainable.” The importation of illegal goods, such as goods that infringe intellectual property rights (IPR), or legal goods which, for example, are smuggled into a country to avoid the payment of duty or whose value has been misreported, can do immense harm to a country’s economy. It is not only a question of financial losses for both legitimate traders and governments, such activities can also affect governance, the economy, development and human security across the globe.

All these different aspects of securing the business environment have been on the WCO’s agenda for years, and many WCO tools, instruments and initiatives that have been developed can readily assist Customs administrations in building the ideal environment for international trade to flourish and grow, thereby enhancing economic development.

Such instruments and initiatives include the revised WCO International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures, the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade or the WCO Security Programme. The latter aims at addressing border security-related challenges by helping countries with passenger controls, the fight against chemicals that could be used in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), strategic trade controls, the fight against the trafficking in small arms and light weapons (SALW), and terrorist financing. All these tools, instruments and initiatives not only enhance Customs' overall trade-related processes, they also contribute to an increase in both security and trade facilitation.

This year's theme also echoes the current Customs focus on trade facilitation, created by the entry into force of the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement as well as the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives meeting at the United Nations' Headquarters in New York in September 2015 to decide on new global "sustainable development goals." Moreover, it supports efforts aimed at unleashing the potential of women in business, or female entrepreneurs, as a means to enhance enterprise development, create more employment, and alleviate poverty.

Over the course of 2018, I invite all WCO Members to promote and share information on how they are striving to create an environment for businesses that will foster their participation in international trade and ensure a level playing field for all. The idea is, as always, to highlight challenges faced, showcase projects that will inspire others, and communicate best practices. Such activities go a long way in bringing the global Customs community together, forging a spirit of partnership and cooperation, both essential to achieving success in today's trading landscape.

On the part of the WCO Secretariat, we will continue to enhance the promotion of relevant tools, instruments and initiatives as well as the work being done in areas as diverse as combating cross-border crime, engagement with stakeholders, data collection and analysis, digitalization of Customs services, effective management of cross-border e-Commerce transactions, standardization of information exchange, strengthening Customs-Tax cooperation, tackling trade mis-invoicing and fighting corruption, to name a few.

Wishing you all a very joyful International Customs Day!

Kunio Mikuriya
Secretary General

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