

RESOLUTION OF THE CUSTOMS CO-OPERATION COUNCIL
ON THE ROLE OF CUSTOMS IN NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF

(June 2011)

THE CUSTOMS CO-OPERATION COUNCIL*

Noting :

- (a) the increase in the number of natural disasters affecting populations and requiring urgent international humanitarian assistance, and the need to enhance the role of Customs in the management of humanitarian relief operations;
- (b) the Council's Decision, taken in June 2010, to develop a WCO strategy for enhancing the role of Customs in natural disaster relief, which should include a set of practical recommendations for Customs on what to do in emergency situations of this kind;

Desiring :

- (a) to facilitate the entry, exit and transit of disaster relief personnel and their possessions needed to provide rapid assistance to the victims;
- (b) to speed up the clearance and release of relief consignments¹ at borders in order to ensure that aid reaches victims in need in a timely manner;

Highlighting the need for disaster preparedness in Customs administrations, so that they can respond efficiently and effectively to emergencies;

Recognizing :

- (a) that Customs facilitation in the area of emergency humanitarian relief should take account of the principles of risk management and should be achieved without compromising appropriate standards of Customs control;
- (b) the importance of strengthening the partnership with international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector which play an essential role in the management of humanitarian emergencies, and of providing them with all necessary information about the regulations and procedures applicable to relief consignments;
- (c) the need to build Members' capacities in this domain, and to involve the WCO's partners in capacity building activities to be carried out in order to create the requisite synergy;
- (d) the importance of having a national body to manage natural disasters, which would ensure proper co-ordination with all relevant agencies, including Customs;
- (e) the importance of ensuring an open flow of information in times of crisis;

* Customs Co-operation Council is the official name of the World Customs Organization (WCO).

¹ Relief consignments as defined in Chapter 5 of Specific Annex J to the Revised Kyoto Convention.

RESOLVES :

To invite Members to :

- (1)** implement measures as contained in Chapter 5 of Specific Annex J to the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) relating to relief consignments and, where necessary, sign the United Nations Model Agreement on Customs Facilitation²;
- (2)** plan for, in the interests of proper preparation, all the Customs procedures specifically applicable to relief consignments and incorporate them in their national legislation and/or regulations and, wherever possible, in their national emergency plan. These procedures, including the list of operational border entry and exit points, should be made available to the public, using tools such as Members' national Web sites and/or the Directory managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)³;
- (3)** carry out (1) diagnostics on the procedures introduced for the Customs processing of emergency humanitarian assistance and their capacity to put those procedures into operation in the event of a natural disaster; and (2) simulation exercises to test their level of preparedness and capacity to manage emergency situations and possibly to verify the quality of national emergency plans;
- (4)** draw up and implement a training plan to ensure that their Customs staff are qualified and able to manage these kinds of emergencies;
- (5)** manage borders in an efficient, simplified and co-ordinated manner, including sharing of information, with the other national authorities involved in the handling of relief consignments, disaster relief personnel and their possessions, while using existing clearance systems in order to provide for rapid, efficient and centralized processing of these consignments;
- (6)** review and, where necessary, update bilateral mutual administrative assistance arrangements between Customs administrations in order to manage emergencies;
- (7)** inform the Secretariat of measures taken in this area, especially those relating to points (1) to (6) of this Resolution;

To instruct the Secretariat to :

- (8)** compile an inventory of existing tools and instruments, such as the RKC, the United Nations Model Agreement on Customs Facilitation and other model agreements developed by Members at the national level or the IDRL Guidelines⁴, dealing with Customs formalities for the clearance of relief consignments at exportation, during transit or at importation;

² The United Nations Model Agreement on Customs Facilitation is to be found at the Appendix to the Guidelines to Chapter 5 of Specific Annex J to the RKC.

³ Directory of National Focal Points and Legislation for Customs Facilitation in International Emergency Humanitarian Assistance.

⁴ IDRL Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance (adopted by the IFRC in 2007).

- (9) organize, in collaboration with OCHA and the IFRC⁵, regional seminars to promote the use of these existing tools and instruments and to gather Members' feedback on their future needs;
- (10) study the extent to which the key principles of the SAFE Framework of Standards, such as advance information, the Authorized Economic Operator concept, Trade Recovery Guidelines or the use of technology, could prove relevant in further facilitating the process of clearing relief consignments. This study shall be conducted in consultation with the SAFE Working Group and, if necessary, in collaboration with a group of volunteers and its outcome shall be presented to the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) in early 2012;
- (11) ascertain from the Ad Hoc Group on Globally Networked Customs (GNC) how the information exchange envisaged within the framework of GNC could facilitate entry, exit and transit of relief consignments, disaster relief personnel and their possessions;
- (12) create a dedicated Web page on the WCO Public Web site, containing all existing instruments of relevance in this domain as well as all the useful links to tools developed by the various partners involved in managing natural disaster relief operations. Within that framework, provision shall also be made for a forum facilitating effective communication and the exchange of experiences between Members, together with a mechanism for easily identifying persons responsible for the management of emergency procedures within Customs administrations;
- (13) with a view to protecting the cultural heritage of the affected country and as Customs plays a fundamental role in the fight against the unauthorized export of cultural property, publish and send an alert to all Customs administrations to increase their vigilance at borders on cultural artefacts that may be smuggled or exported illegally;
- (14) provide capacity building to assist Members in implementing this Resolution, especially with regard to measures relating to points (1) to (6) thereof;
- (15) periodically report to the PTC on implementation measures relating to points (8) to (14) of this Resolution. In addition, and based on information provided by Members in point (7), a report will be made to the Policy Commission in June 2012. An initial assessment of the implementation of this Resolution shall subsequently be presented to the Policy Commission in June 2013;

To task the PTC to :

- (16) monitor the implementation of this Resolution subsequent to the June 2011 Council Sessions.

⁵ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).