



Asia and the Pacific and the Americas: Customs Leaders' Partnership Dialogue – Efficient and Secure Trade for Shared Prosperity

**4–5 April 2013
Panama City, Panama**

Summary

1. The customs heads and representatives of Asia and the Pacific and the Americas¹ convened a partnership dialogue (the Dialogue) in Panama City, Panama, on 4–5 April 2013 in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Customs Organization (WCO). The Vice Minister for Foreign Trade of Panama welcomed the participants at the Dialogue. The WCO's Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs) and Regional Offices for Capacity Building (ROCBs) from the two regions also participated in this Dialogue.
2. For the first time, participants from the two regions gathered to discuss and exchange views on key customs-related issues and challenges, as well as South-South cooperation opportunities between the two regions. With the ongoing global rebalancing, trade flows are likely to change considerably. South-South trade between the two regions is expected to expand over the coming years. In parallel, trade between developing and developed countries in the two regions will also be transformed. The future composition and patterns of trade will become more complex. Innovative approaches and agility in facilitating and securing trade will be required. High levels of excellence in human capital and partnerships will be needed to deliver complex tasks.
3. The Dialogue underscored the economic and social significance of customs operations in attaining sustainable prosperity and ensuring the welfare of the people in the two regions, offering a development dividend for all countries in a world of increasing globalization. It acknowledged the importance of cooperation, in particular South-South cooperation, given the substantial increases in trade and investment between the two regions. Furthermore, it acknowledged the important role of regional cooperation programs supported by ADB and IDB to facilitate and secure trade within and between the two regions.
4. The Dialogue reaffirmed the vital role of customs in enhancing economic competitiveness, in particular through harmonizing customs procedures at the border. In this context, the Dialogue underscored the importance of the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC)—the heart of the WCO Economic Competitiveness Package and the principal guide for simplifying and harmonizing customs procedures. The Dialogue encouraged accession to the RKC and subsequent domestic regulatory reforms. Also highlighted was the key role and responsibility of customs in ongoing regional economic integration.
5. Electronic exchange of information has gained traction in both public and private sectors, replacing paper-based transactions and attaining faster and more accurate operations. It is expected that customs operations will increasingly connect countries electronically through information exchange. In particular, it was emphasized that the Single Window (SW) should continue to be an enabler for inter-

¹ "Asia and the Pacific" includes developing countries from East Asia, Central and West Asia, the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The "Americas" covers North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.



regional connectivity. It was also underlined that active information exchange between customs administrations through SW environments will facilitate and secure trade between the two regions.

6. A number of customs administrations in both regions have already introduced Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) programs and Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) in line with the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade. Given the substantial increases in trade and investment in the two regions, the Dialogue confirmed a need for more AEOs and MRAs and private sector engagement to facilitate and secure trade.

7. Increasing challenges and complexity in international trade require customs administrations to improve operational efficiency. The participants shared experiences in the use of performance measurements such as Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring, and the WCO's Time Release Study—to assess the effectiveness of actual operations and identify areas for improvement. The Dialogue confirmed the usefulness of such measurements.

8. The participants discussed cooperation between customs administrations in the protection of society by combating illicit trade. They shared experiences in addressing the illegal trade of harmful and dangerous goods—drugs, explosives, firearms, and counterfeit goods. The Dialogue confirmed the need to promote customs to customs enforcement information exchange using tools such as the WCO's Customs Enforcement Network (CEN), CENcomm and the RILO network. It acknowledged the operational effectiveness of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-WCO Container Control Program in ensuring security of the international supply chain.

9. Given the increasing need for efficiency and effectiveness gains at the border to meet the substantial trade challenges, the Dialogue underscored the importance of actively investing in human capital to build sustainable institutional capacity. In this respect, the participants appreciated the support of ADB, IDB, WCO including RILOs and ROCBs, and their partners in the two regions and requested further assistance on customs reform and modernization to meet trade challenges and complexities in the 21st century.

10. The Dialogue identified four priority themes—trade facilitation, trade security, information exchange and protection of society—where the customs administrations from the two regions can cooperate in the future, through capacity building, experience sharing, and joint undertakings. The participants also agreed to deepen dialogue between the two regions, and proposed that technical experts from interested countries gather together to discuss follow-up actions and to identify concrete and well-designed joint undertakings to work toward tangible outcomes. ADB, IDB and WCO—together with the RILOs and ROCBs—expressed their support for this partnership. In particular, regional cooperation programs promoted by ADB and IDB—together with their development partners—will offer excellent platforms for South-South dialogue on the priority themes.

11. Customs will further solidify partnerships with all stakeholders—including the private sector, other government agencies involved in international trade, and the general public—and will actively support shared prosperity with sound social development in the two regions through achieving efficient and secure trade.

12. The participants extended appreciation to the Government of Panama for hosting the Dialogue and to ADB, IDB, and WCO for their financial and technical support for this timely event.