

The Cotonou Declaration

Brussels, 24 June 2010

Speech by the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization

Mr. President,

It is with honour and great pleasure that the Customs community welcomes you here today on the occasion of its annual Council Sessions. I would like to speak on behalf of everybody present in applauding and sharing your fight for peace and your enduring commitment in the service of the poorest countries.

Customs has always been on the frontline in detecting and combating new threats hanging over citizens. Long focused on commercial fraud, over the past century Customs has witnessed the exponential growth of the drugs trade.

Counterfeiting: a new threat

And we have seen the emergence of a new threat, rapidly expanding in an area that is extremely lucrative and less risky for traffickers – counterfeiting. This evil, which now affects all sectors, risks the health and the very lives of consumers and is damaging peaceful relations between countries. It is the duty of each and every one of us to do our utmost to curb this threat.

I am convinced that the solution lies in a concerted approach on a wider scale, and the Declaration signed in Cotonou at the initiative of the Fondation Chirac (Chirac Foundation) is a huge step forward. Customs and the WCO, as technical experts, must support it.

The WCO: a crucial player

Positioned as it is at land, sea and air borders Customs is a key player in the fight against counterfeiting and piracy. This is borne out by the figures – Customs makes 90% of the seizures of counterfeit goods in Europe, and over 70% worldwide.

This lead position obliges the WCO to do everything in its power to develop close cooperation between stakeholders - Customs administrations and international organizations, not forgetting the private sector - to ensure that our action in the field is as effective as possible.

Measures of long standing

The WCO has a long-standing programme of anti-counterfeiting training which consists of diagnostic missions and operational seminars.

These diagnostic missions take account of the socio-economic circumstances of each country and review their legislative arsenal, risk analysis, information sharing and cooperation with the private sector and the supervisory authorities.

The national and regional operational seminars present and implement new risk analysis techniques at ports and airports.

By way of example, no fewer than 140 of our Members received training in 2009-2010.

These operations in the field have demonstrated the need to give Customs officials the effective means to carry out their mission, particularly with regard to identifying counterfeits.

The WCO: a driving force

In practice, compared to drugs or weapons, counterfeiting in general and counterfeiting of medicines and other dangerous products in particular, confronts Customs officials with the basic issue of identifying fake goods, given the technical nature of the products and the fact that they are constantly evolving.

In order to overcome these difficulties, the WCO has been a driving force in taking advantage of all the possibilities offered by new technologies.

To support and complement these missions in the field, the WCO has consequently developed an ongoing training tool for the identification of counterfeit goods which it is implementing in partnership with the manufacturers concerned. We call it PMI or Public-Member Interface.

Coupled with the existing secure communication tool, CENcomm, the PMI will give Customs officials in the field access to real-time information which is vital to enabling counterfeit goods to be recognized.

This permanent training and information tool will be tested as of next week in a major field operation. It will be made available to Customs from the fourth quarter of this year.

The WCO response to the Cotonou Declaration

The signatories to the Cotonou Declaration call for the introduction, in the field, of effective instruments to combat trafficking, with trained staff and systems tailored to address the realities of the traffic in fake medicines.

You will find, Mr. President, my esteemed colleagues that this Declaration is fully echoed within these walls, and the WCO will be taking up the baton as soon as it has the opportunity.

Conclusion

In conclusion Mr. President, allow me to paraphrase a great man, Charles De Gaulle, who I believe is very important to you, when I say, "Customs has won some battles, but Customs has not yet won the war".

You may, however, rest assured that we are wholeheartedly committed to eradicating this evil.

It is to save lives Mr. President that I am responding to your call.