

# First Global Canine Forum held at WCO Headquarters

AFTER HAVING DEDICATED 2010 to Customs-Business Partnerships and having addressed the themes of Coordinated Border Management, risk management and the use of high-performance technologies and tools through a number of different activities, the time was ripe to focus on the cornerstone of Customs modernization: human resources and training, that is to say a “professional, knowledge-based service culture”. This is one of the building blocks of the WCO Customs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century vision, and the theme for 2011.

Against this backdrop, there was a need to underscore the importance of training to acquire professional knowledge within the organizational apparatus of a modern, effective and efficient Customs administration. The Global Forum on dogs and handler teams as part of the enforcement apparatus is in keeping with this approach.

It was organized by the WCO from 25 to 27 January 2011, around the same time as the Organization’s 2011 International Customs Day celebrations were taking place. The primary objective of this Forum was to

share current best practices and experiences among the various countries having set up dog and handler training centres, as well as to identify shared challenges in terms of rolling out new canine centres with the requisite training programmes and operational models to accompany them.

Dog and handler programmes were originally aimed at enhancing Customs’ anti-drug trafficking activities. This traditional role has grown to encompass other areas such as fighting terrorism, especially through the detection of weapons and explosives, and more recently to combating trafficking in currency, counterfeit CD-ROMs, cigarettes or even pharmaceuticals and CITES goods. Dog and handler teams now form a key component of global risk management programmes established by Customs services.

In his keynote address, the WCO Secretary General, Kunio Mikuriya, began by recalling, among other things, the primary objectives of the Forum which included building partnerships. He then established a link between the organizing of this Forum,

deemed a genuine vehicle for participants to share their experiences, and International Customs Day focusing this year on “Knowledge, a catalyst for Customs excellence”.

The Forum was attended by over 120 participants representing close to 60 Member countries and international organizations. Over the course of three days, activities took the form of workshops, canine demonstrations and discussions around the ten exhibition stands run by WCO Members. It also led to the establishment of a global network of canine experts who uses the WCO CENcomm “Global Canine Forum”, specially adapted to the purpose and operational since 27 January 2011.

The workshops were structured around four main themes – dog selection and breeding, training for dogs and dog handlers, management of dog and handler teams, and the operational sphere.





The following issues were discussed in each of the workshops:

#### **Dog selection and breeding**

- How are dogs selected?
- Which breed of dog for which discipline?
- Which techniques are available for dog breeding?

#### **Training for dogs and handlers, and training centres**

- Where and how are dogs trained?
- What does the training cover?
- How are dog handlers recruited and trained?
- How do national and regional training centres for dog and handler teams operate?
- Involvement by dog and handler teams in detecting weapons and explosives

#### **Management of dog and handler teams, and the operational sphere**

- Logistics and infrastructure (kennels, vehicles, training tools used)
- Importance of management/ongoing monitoring in terms of evaluation and measuring effectiveness
- Inclusion of dog and handler teams in the worldwide enforcement mechanism
- The issue of using dogs in various realms of intervention
- Cooperation with other enforcement agencies

Exhibition stands provided an opportunity for some participants to publicize their dog training centres and to promote their expertise using videos. Some dog and handler teams had come to demonstrate the detection of narcotics, both active drugs and passive drugs (Belgium, Denmark and Hungary), weapons and explosives (France), banknotes (Argentina, Denmark and Italy), CITES goods (Germany), etc. Secretary General Mikuriya awarded these teams, representing seven countries (Argentina, Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Germany and Italy), with certificates and commemorative medals.

The next Global Canine Forum will be organized by the WCO in 2012.

More information  
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