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THE RILO NETWORK

a vital resource to support global Customs intelligence

The exchange of intelligence at national, regional and international levels is a critical mechanism in order to render enforcement actions by Customs authorities more effective and to secure the optimum use of available resources. At the strategic level the WCO has incorporated the aim of intelligence exchange among all stakeholders, recognising the contribution this objective has in furthering the protection of society, public health and safety. Therefore, in 1987, the first Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) was established with the intent of creating a Global Intelligence Network.

Today the RILO network has grown to 11 offices providing effective coverage throughout all six WCO regions. RILO offices are located in the following territories: Eastern and Central Europe, Western Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), North Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, Middle East, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean and South America.

REGIONAL OUTREACH

Each RILO office covers a number of Member states within their respective region and is staffed by personnel from those affiliated Member states as well as the host administration where the regional office is housed. This principle of secondment of international staff within the RILO network is essential for the acceptance and operational continuity of the RILO within each region. These regional offices operate in the interest of their affiliated Members, represented by National Contact Points (NCPs), and as such, there is no hierarchy as each participating country is equally represented in relation to the common interests of all affiliated Members. In this regard, the independent nature of the RILO network enables accountability to the Head of RILO with mutual representation through the WCO Secretariat ensuring appropriate consultation to the WCO Enforcement Committee and Council to which the RILO network reports.

The unique nature of the RILO network offers an added layer of information exchange to the already existing intelligence exchange taking place between the Secretariat and Member administrations at the “strategic” or Director-General level. In similar fashion as the WCO Secretariat, the RILO network responds to the needs of its Members, albeit at the regional or tactical level. At this level, the RILO network also offers support to its Members by arranging the nominations of NCPs as well as organising annual regional meetings with all RILO NCPs within their jurisdiction.

OPERATIONAL PARTNERS

At the operational level, the RILO network supports its Member Customs administrations by responding to requests for intelligence or operational support, designing and implementing target-oriented intelligence analysis projects and regional intelligence-led operations, facilitating mutual administrative assistance, and promoting and maintaining regional cooperation with other law enforcement agencies and organizations in accordance with any rules or provisions being established by the WCO Enforcement Committee or the Council.

Today, under this structure, the RILO network remains an exclusive and unique Customs intelligence exchange entity, enabling Globally Networked Customs capability, connecting Customs to Customs throughout most of the WCO Member base and likewise represents a key component to the WCO Global Information and Intelligence Strategy.

Among the tools provided by the WCO to the RILO network, as well as the greater WCO Member base, are the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) and the WCO Customs Enforcement Network Communication (CENCComm) platform. The RILO network uses the CEN databases to analyse seizures and develop regional intelligence products, and is responsible for verifying the data quality of CEN submissions from its regional partners or NCPs.

At the international level, the WCO Secretariat is responsible for the central management of the CEN, operating and maintaining the system as a global information and intelligence tool for the RILO network, periodically conducting global strategic and tactical analyses based on information available in the CEN, circulating a summary of its analyses in its annual reports, offering training and technical assistance to the RILOs and their Members, and sharing strategic information with other international organisations engaged in combating organised crime.

The RILO network is a premier user of the CENCComm platform. As a multi-regional Intelligence and Information exchange network, the RILOs are actively involved in several ongoing projects and operations organised by the Secretariat, WCO Members, or individual RILO teams. By taking an active role throughout hundreds of operations over the years, the RILO network remains a steadfast WCO strategic intelligence capability in the global Customs goal of identifying, disrupting and dismantling trans-national criminal organizations.

MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

Intelligence exchange is split into three levels, operating interactively and in a complementary manner: at the national level, Member administrations’ NCPs gather information on seizures made from existing sources at the national level, electronically input data into the CEN or transmit the data to RILOs by fax or post, analyse the information collected at the national level to ascertain new trends, produce alerts and transmit them to the RILOs for regional circulation, and co-operate nationally with a full gamut of enforcement agencies or services;

At the regional level, the RILOs study and evaluate international seizures, verify the accuracy of the CEN data supplied by the NCPs, prepare and circulate alerts and intelligence profiles, issue periodicals or ad hoc analysis bulletins, devise, organise and support regional intelligence-based operations, facilitate mutual assistance and co-operation with other law enforcement services, and provide technical or other assistance to NCPs;

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