

Brief on the WTO Negotiating Group meeting on Trade Facilitation on 15 and 16 February 2006 and related meetings

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The WTO Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group Meeting was held in Geneva on 15 and 16 February 2006. The WCO Secretariat, along with the Secretariats of IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and World Bank, was invited to attend the meeting. It was quite well represented by the WTO Members. Several countries were represented or supported by a Customs officer based in Geneva, Brussels or the Capitals.

It was the first meeting after the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong, China, December 2005. Eight documents were newly introduced by the proponents. WTO members discussed these papers. The India proposals addressing the procedures of other than Customs (food safety testing) were welcomed by several WTO members as these papers were produced as a result of consultation with its stakeholders. Some delegations pointed out that the Indian proposals would be better dealt with under SPS TBT agreements. The EU paper on GATT Article V (freedom of transit) was also welcomed for its comprehensiveness. The EU paper is close to legal drafting, but the drafting of legal text *per se* was not raised by the WTO Negotiating Group. After all, many of the WTO members wanted to take more time to examine the contents of new proposals and reserved their reaction to these documents until next Negotiating Group meeting (April).

The observer organizations updated their activities related to the WTO Trade Facilitation negotiations. The Secretariat introduced to the WTO members: the entry into force of the revised Kyoto Convention on 3 February; complementary nature of the WCO instruments to the WTO commitments; establishment of Capacity Building Directorate; and continued inter-agency co-operation in this field (see [Speaking memo](#)). The World Bank briefed a new stage of its gap analysis project on which the WCO has co-operated; it would survey the cost of trade facilitation in close co-operation with the other relevant international organizations, in particular, the WCO and the IMF. UNCTAD and OECD also emphasized the inter-agency co-operation in their activities.

Next WTO Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group meeting would take place on 5-7 April and the WCO, together with other Annex D organizations, was invited to that meeting.

Several informal inter-agency meetings were held during that time to exchange information and views on the WTO regional workshops and related activities. Such consultations included meetings with newly elected Chairperson, the WTO Secretariat, and the World Bank. The WTO Secretariat would continue inviting the WCO to their regional workshops.

The Secretariat was also invited to the consultations with national delegations for exchanging information and views on the WTO negotiations. Many delegations were now aware of the WCO instruments and tools. They also appreciated the WCO's inter-agency co-operation in the area of capacity building for the WTO negotiations with the emphasis of comparative advantage of individual organizations.

On 17 February, a meeting of Global Facilitation Partnership for Transport and Trade (GFP) took place at the UN building. The WCO is a Core partner to this initiative. The participants discussed: charges and formalities connected to importation and exportation; freedom of transit; transparency and predictability in trade regulations; and facilitation and security. Many participants were well aware of the WCO instruments, notably the revised Kyoto Convention and the SAFE. They also discussed possible institutional co-operation mechanism for trade facilitation capacity building, which would continue to be discussed in future.

The World Bank offered to host next GFP meeting in Washington, D.C. in September 2006.