

Brussels, 21 April 2008

**Successful partnership for the Columbus Programme  
A new contribution of almost 5 million euros for Capacity Building**

At a ceremony held in Brussels on 21 April 2008, the World Customs Organization signed a partnership agreement with the Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA), through which the latter will contribute 45,200,000 Swedish Kronor (4,700,000 Euro) to the WCO Capacity Building agenda and Columbus Programme.

The contract was signed by the Swedish Ambassador Mr. Sven-Olof Petersson on behalf of SIDA and by Mr. Michel Danet, Secretary General of the WCO.



Representatives from the East African Community (EAC) and the Commissioner General of the Uganda Revenue Authority, Mrs. Allen Kagina, who is Chairperson of the Steering Group for the WCO-EAC Economic Development Programme in Africa, also attended the signing ceremony in Brussels.

Mr. Michel Danet said that “this is a great moment for our Organization and for the Capacity Building programme. This contribution is the single largest donation so far, and is a long-term commitment to our efforts to support our developing country Members through the Columbus Programme. This contribution will be handled through a Capacity Building fund in accordance with the WCO’s governance rules and audit procedures, thus ensuring fair and equal treatment for all potential recipients. This is the way I wish Capacity Building funding to be managed for the benefit of all stakeholders. On this historic day I wish to thank the Swedish Government, on behalf of my Members, for its support. I expect this to be the first of several similar contributions in the coming years, and am delighted that international institutions and donors have shown their support for our Capacity Building model and the important work of reforming and modernizing Customs”.

The donation consists of a voluntary contribution to the WCO Capacity Building fund over five years, aimed at Phase 2 of the WCO Columbus Programme for emerging economies and developing countries. The Programme is also designed to assist the Member Countries of the EAC, SADC, ECOWAS and MENA economic regions and a number of specific countries, so that they can work towards the objective of regional Customs unions and consequently reduce barriers to trade.

The first programme to be sponsored from the SIDA contribution will be a regional SAFE implementation plan for the East African Community (EAC), based on the Columbus Programme. This programme has been developed by the EAC countries and the WCO Secretariat, in close co-operation with the EAC Secretariat, SITPRO and Business Action for Improving Customs Administration in Africa (BAFICAA). The EAC programme will cover a prioritized project plan under the Columbus Programme for modernization of Customs administrations in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, and will be fully funded for five years from the SIDA contribution.

Commissioner General Kagina said that "the countries of East Africa, and indeed most African countries, depend to a large extent on tax revenues generated by Customs through international trade. It is for that reason that African Customs must be supported through focused Capacity Building programmes to enhance our ability to facilitate trade while at the same time collecting revenue. The contribution provided by SIDA through the WCO for the EAC Programme is indeed a welcome intervention, and will go a long way not only to modernizing the way we do business in the EAC, but also to building strong public-private partnerships. On behalf of the East African Countries, I would like to express our appreciation to the Swedish Government for this very timely support."

According to a statement from SIDA Headquarters :

"It is important to support the World Customs Organization's Capacity Building Programme, known internationally as the Columbus Programme. This decision meets the priorities set by the Swedish Government in terms of trade-related development co-operation and increased focus in the area of trade facilitation and Customs issues. This co-operation is aimed at regional integration and economic growth, at activities for harmonization of trade procedures, and at Capacity Building development to implement international conventions and agreements. The Programme objective is to contribute to the development of a sustainable and improved economy for the beneficiary countries in terms of trade, security and social protection, through the development of Customs authorities as fair and effective trade management partners and as modern social protection and revenue collection services".

