

WCO Technology and Innovation Forum
WCO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium
5 to 6 November 2009

Concluding remarks by Kunio Mikuriya, WCO Secretary General

During the last two of days, we have enjoyed the inaugural WCO Technology and Innovation Forum here at WCO Headquarters. Judging by my discussions with sponsors, exhibitors and delegates, the conclusion can be made that there has been a need for this kind of a Forum to bring together Customs administrations and technology developers to exchange experience, best practices and to address current and emerging challenges with regard to the use of technology.

Before thanking all the parties who contributed to the Forum and letting you all go home, I would like to briefly touch upon some key themes that emerged during the forum.

To begin with, it seems to be rather clear that technology and innovation can facilitate the work of Customs administrations and contribute to better security and greater trade facilitation. In an era of declining resources and ever increasing trade flows, technology and innovation can assist Customs and its partner agencies at the border in their tasks; enabling them to do more with less. As we have seen during these two days, there is a wide range of different technologies available from large scanning devices to small holograms that in their own way assist Customs and other border agencies to better meet their performance targets and objectives.

Having said this and acknowledging that technologies bring about a lot of new opportunities, one needs to take into account that work still remains to be done and challenges to be overcome to fully exploit the benefits now becoming available through the use of technology. However, it is useful to remind ourselves that technology's role in core Customs processes are supportive. The mere purchase of technical equipment or technology does not solve the challenges faced by Customs or solve our problems overnight.

The decision to purchase technology and technical equipment should be underpinned by a strong business case and should always form part of a wider goal to improve core processes. The use of technology needs to be combined with information flows and risk management to deliver more efficient and effective outcomes, whether those goals are associated with security, facilitation, contraband detection or revenue assurance. Technology will rarely stand in isolation from good information and good risk assessment processes.

Customs administrations should take the time to carefully define their needs before investing in technology. It is a combination of the right technology in the right place that usually delivers the best 'return-on-investment' (ROI); a perspective which is even more important when considering the large capital outlays and investments that are needed for the purchase, deployment, and ongoing maintenance of some of these technologies.

As mentioned by some of the panellists, there are many challenges that Customs administrations all over the world are facing with the use of technology. Various questions relating to issues such as purchase, deployment, maintenance and training need further attention. The WCO has taken action in this regard and organized regional seminars together with its Regional Offices for Capacity Building (ROCBs) to share experiences. It has also developed tools, such as the Scanning Guidelines, that are available to WCO Members and facilitate their task in acquiring and maintaining technology.

One of the key outcomes of the Forum relates to the public-private partnership in the field of technology. Many speakers referred to the need for better dialogue between Customs administrations and technology suppliers both in developing emerging technologies and using current ones. As mentioned by Judge Bonner in his Keynote Speech, technologies used by Customs and other Border agencies cannot be developed only by the private sector. It is

important that Customs administrations engage and participate in the development process and express their needs and demands with regard to existing and new products. By doing this, Customs administrations can not only make their voices heard but also contribute to the increased probability that the market will have better products that address more efficiently the needs of Customs and border agencies.

The WCO can also play an important role in this regard. This Forum opens and creates one useful platform for cooperation and dialogue. The WCO is also reviewing its Committee structures to see whether one of its committees could provide a natural forum for the dialogue and development of inspection technologies.

I would also like to remind both Members as well as technology providers about the WCO Databank on Advanced Technology. This Databank has been created by the Secretariat to incorporate information on different products and technology suppliers. It is available both to our Members and our private sector partners. The core idea behind the Databank is to give WCO Members the chance to learn about technology suppliers and products on the Market. They can also make available information on their experiences, needs and challenges with regard to the use of technology. For technology providers, it is possible to supply and update information on their companies and products. I strongly encourage you to visit the Databank which may be accessed via the online services section of our website.

Regarding the outcome of the Forum, there are few key things that can be highlighted:

- As many of you already know, the tasks of Customs administrations and other border agencies are increasingly seen through a holistic, 'whole-of-government' approach. Concepts such as 'coordinated border management' (CBM) are becoming more important to WCO Members. Technology indeed plays an important role in materializing some of the goals of CBM and better enables all parties to exploit the benefits from a more coordinated approach to managing national borders.
- During the Inter-Agency Forum on CBM this June, the WCO was acknowledged as the international platform for discussing coordination among various stakeholders. The WCO can also play a similar role in the field of inspection technology and I am more than happy to invite all other agencies operating at the border to be a part of the Forum.
- A further need was also raised to go beyond other border agencies and to also invite other stakeholders, such as port operators, to be part of the process and to learn more about available technologies and how they can be used for furthering the goals, and increasing the efficiency, of border management. I can inform you that the WCO is more than happy to provide a platform in the form of the Technology and Innovation Forum to all interested stakeholders in the future.

I would sincerely like to thank all the sponsors, exhibitors, panellists and delegates for their contribution to making this event a success. During these two days we have heard a wide range of high quality presentations by our panellists. The presentations were followed by discussions addressing many important questions that are of utmost importance to Customs administrations.

I would especially like to thank the exhibitors and the industry session participants for their contribution too. It would be hard to imagine a Technology and Innovation Forum and to receive full benefits from it without having actual equipment and products on display. Once again my sincere thanks to you all.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank our corporate sponsor De La Rue for their efforts and contribution and everyone from the MCI as well as the WCO staff who have been involved in organizing this event.

With these words I would like to close the WCO 2009 Technology and Innovation Forum and wish you all a pleasant and safe trip back home. I hope that you have found this Forum useful and I look forward to welcoming you to the WCO Technology and Innovation Forum in 2010.

Thank you.

Resource

- [Read the Secretary General's welcoming speech](#)
- [Click here](#) for more information about the event