



**Message from the World Customs Organization
International Customs Day 2009**

The environment and the threats it faces is now high on the world agenda. Whether we are talking about climate change, the hole in the ozone layer, global warming, massive deforestation through illegal logging, disappearing species, longer droughts, ever-increasing industrial pollutants in rivers or even the melting ice cap, one is left with the same sense of concern and dismay!

Luckily, it is now internationally recognised that the illegal trade in “environmentally-sensitive” commodities such as ozone depleting substances, hazardous and other waste, chemical weapons, and endangered fauna and flora is a global problem with serious consequences for the earth and its people.

We all need to play our part to rescue the environment for future generations and the global Customs community shares the same responsibility. But we have not been resting on our laurels; in fact Customs has done much to contribute to protecting the environment over the years. At the international level the WCO has continued to enhance cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations who share our commitment to protecting the planet, and at the regional and national level, Customs administrations have actively participated in successful operations aimed at strengthening environment border enforcement.

Our latest initiative, the WCO Recommendation on combating environmental offences which was approved by the WCO Council during its June 2008 Sessions, encourages all WCO Members to deal decisively with those who commit such offences. It is therefore incumbent upon all WCO Members to promote environmental protection by ensuring that it remains a priority, among others, for Customs administrations across the globe. In this regard, WCO Members can count on the Secretariat to continue to support them through innovative capacity building programmes, by promoting information sharing, and by producing additional tools for administrations.

With the above in mind, I have decided to dedicate International Customs Day on 26 January 2009 to the environment with the theme “***Customs and the environment: Protecting our natural heritage***”. In this regard, I hope that you will join me in committing your administration to beefing up environmental protection at borders, by fighting environment crime actively, by diligently applying environment controls, and by widely communicating your efforts.

Through our collective action to combat this illegal trade, not only will we be protecting the welfare of society, we will also be preserving our natural heritage.

May I take this opportunity to wish the entire global Customs community a very happy International Customs Day.

My very warmest regards,

Kunio Mikuriya
Secretary General
January 2009

Message also available in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish