6th Annual International Conference
“Georgia Against Counterfeiting and Piracy”

Video Message
Dr. Kunio Mikuriya, WCO Secretary General
25 July 2022

Excellencies, distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Greetings from the headquarters of the World Customs Organization in Brussels.

2. Allow me to express my congratulations to Georgia for undertaking such an important international conference on the fight against counterfeiting and piracy, and my sincere thanks for inviting me as a speaker.

3. This important task of protecting society from health, safety and economic risks posed by fake or substandard manufacturing practices, which often involve criminal organizations, requires a solid legal framework for cooperation that defines the intellectual property rights (IPR) and related border control measures.

4. This is why I appreciate collaboration between the National Intellectual Property Center and the Revenue Service, supported by the Commercial Law Development Project (CLDP) of the US Department of Commerce.

5. The WCO considers this form of illicit trade as one of the key activities to be addressed in its Strategic Plan and is working hard to implement a comprehensive IPR, Health & Safety strategy.

6. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic it has become a global concern to ensure the smooth cross-border movement of pharmaceutical and medical devices.

7. At the same time, it was clear that organized criminal groups would exploit the situation to make illegal profits from illicit trade in fake and substandard medical goods.
8. As part of the efforts to help Members in strengthening border control, the WCO launched its Operation STOP I in 2020 with the participation of 99 WCO Members, supported by relevant international organizations and the private sector.

9. During the Operation STOP I, the WCO provided training to Customs officers in collaboration with the IPR rights holders, in this case pharmaceutical companies, as they had key knowledge and expertise in identifying IPR infringements and other forms of crime.

10. This global operation resulted in the seizure of a huge number of fake medical products, which gave us the opportunity to enhance Customs information exchange network and allowed us to have a valuable insight on criminal organizations’ modus operandi.

11. As it is often the case, the operation resulted in the seizure of ordinary IPR infringing goods such as clothing, watches and shoes, and other illegal goods including narcotics, which allowed us to update the Customs risk indicators.

12. Following the successful development of COVID-19 vaccines, the WCO added fake vaccines in its list of focused areas of control and conducted the STOP II Project.

13. In preparation, the WCO organized 95 webinars, with more than 5000 border officers in attendance, to provide the audience with the necessary training and contacts in collaboration with IPR rights holders in vaccines.

14. 160 WCO Members participated in Operation STOP II, which ran from April 2021 to May 2022.

15. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Georgia Revenue Service for its report on seizure cases.

16. Operations STOP I and STOP II together have resulted in the seizure of over 800 million pieces of medicines, vaccines and medical devices.

17. These results are thanks to the collaborative efforts of Customs officers and their partners around the world and resulted in raising awareness of the importance of IPR protection.

18. Of course, the fight against counterfeit non-pharmaceutical and non-medical devices also remains important, judging by the total number of seizures, which did not decrease during the pandemic.

19. Of course, border enforcement on counterfeit and other illicit goods is another aspect of facilitation for low-risk goods.

20. Therefore data-based risk management is key to ensuring the security and facilitation of trade supply chains.

21. Accordingly, it is important to enhance cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the public and private sectors in sharing data and information.
22. The final point I would like to reiterate is the need to further strengthen cooperation with other international organizations, national regulatory and law enforcement agencies and IPR rights holders.

23. This conference provides an excellent opportunity to understand each other and enhance collaboration of all actors in society and the WCO is proud of being part of this global effort.

24. I wish the conference much success.

Thank you for your attention.

*******