This Conference recognizes the importance of the environmental issues confronting the global community.

As the world mobilizes to respond to issues of climate change, environmental degradation and environmental crime, there will be increasing demands on Customs administrations to play their part.

In addition to continuing to strengthen their current border measures in relation to environmental matters, Customs administrations will need to respond to new or expanded multilateral environmental agreements, regional agreements and national policies, including the possibility of new border measures, both restrictive and facilitative, and an increasing role to be played by Customs in coordinated whole-of-government responses to environmental threats.

The renewed focus and priority being demonstrated by world leaders requires that we not only remain aware of current discussions, but that we are prepared in our administrations and within the WCO to provide thoughtful and considered responses to the questions that will be submitted to Customs.

For the WCO, we need to be able to support our Members during this transition time.

To achieve this will require both dialogue and action. Dialogue without action is pointless, but acting without discussing with stakeholders and experts might lead us to waste time on actions that are either unhelpful or even counter-productive. We need to understand how we can best prioritize our resources.

The discussion in the WCO governing body last week highlighted several needs or areas that we will need to tackle in this area.

It was noted that particular consideration should be given to developing countries’ perspectives in the implementation of Circular Economy policies, including to the risks of environmentally damaging extraction methods of natural resources or
overexploitation. This requires looking at Customs’ practices and trade measures that promote a more sustainable and cooperative relationship between the interests of exporting and importing countries.

- The importance of continuing to assess ways to facilitate the control of environmental Prohibitions & Restrictions and enhance environmental compliance while promoting trade facilitation measures for compliant traders, leveraging on the SAFE Framework of Standards and the Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) programme was also raised. There was a strong desire to continue working on the enforcement area, promoting capacity building and further strengthening cooperation with other international organizations and other stakeholders in the field of environmental protection, avoiding duplication of work and encouraging the sharing of best practices.

- Another theme that was prominent was the need for further work for the promotion of the environmental agenda through the use of the Harmonized System (HS) to make it simpler to implement an environmental policy. There was also some who wished for consideration of the possibility of issuing non-binding guidance on the classification of environmental products.

- In the spirit of this Conference, Members recognized the urgency to address environmental concerns. However, they were also conscious of the need to further assess the concept and scope of Green Customs and develop relevant criteria, including in relation to the role to be played by Customs in the Circular economy and sustainable supply chains.

- Delegates welcomed the work on developing a WCO Guide or Framework on Circular Economy and warmly welcomed this Green Customs Global Conference to further explore the topic and to contribute to providing the foundations for a Green Customs action plan.

- So today we start a new forum for dialogue where we can hear from experts and stakeholders to better understand how Customs’ work can fit within the complex network of actions required to respond to the environmental crisis.

- I welcome all participants to this unique event that combines environmental focus and the Customs focus to help us develop that a roadmap towards a better future.

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