



# PRESS RELEASE

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### **ECOWAS, WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION AGREE TO ENHANCE CAPACITY OF CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS IN WEST AFRICA**

ECOWAS and the World Customs Organization (WCO) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to enhance the capacity of Customs administrations in West Africa in order to deliver more efficiently on their statutory functions and thus contribute to the economic growth and development of the region.

The MOU was signed in Abuja on Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011 by the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Ambassador James Victor Gbeho for ECOWAS while the visiting Secretary General of the World Customs Organization, Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, signed for his organization.

Both the ECOWAS Commission and the WCO agreed on actively promoting the modernization of Customs administrations in the ECOWAS region through the adoption and implementation of Customs instruments and tools sponsored or administered by the WCO, within the mandate sanctioned by the revised ECOWAS Treaty.

Among others, the MOU covers capacity building and training, nomenclature and tariff, customs automation, customs procedures, trade facilitation, supply chain security and origin.

It encourages a regular dialogue between the two parties, a regular exchange of information and ideas in every sector of the cooperation.

Also, both parties agreed to coordinate joint training activities for Customs officers from ECOWAS Member States.

In his remarks at the ceremony, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Ambassador James Victor Gbeho, stressed ECOWAS' recognition of the critical role of customs as an institution to help actualize the dream of a common market through trade liberalization and adoption of a common external tariff (CET).

He explained that ECOWAS was developing a common external tariff as part of the process towards achieving a customs union, and that the Commission would ensure that the region migrates to the 2012 version of the Harmonized System nomenclature from the 2007 version on which negotiations on the CET are based.

Ambassador Gbeho also disclosed that the Commission was interconnecting the customs computer systems in Member States "as a prelude to ultimately having a single platform for customs systems in the region". This, he said, would enhance data exchange and facilitate trade in West Africa.

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He stated that majority of ECOWAS Member States have declared their intention to implement the WCO's SAFE Framework of Standards, which he described as a declaration by the region to modernize customs procedures, improve on the manner cross-border trade is handles in order to facilitate trade without compromising on security and revenue collection.

The ECOWAS boss assured that as the region moves towards a customs union, the Commission would become a rallying point to network its customs administrations and enable them work together for the development of the region.

In his own statement, the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization, Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, described customs as the key to trade and noted that it was the responsibility of the World Customs Organization to connect markets.

While stating that the WCO strongly supports regional integration, Mr. Mikuriya described the ceremony as "very historical and fruitful", saying it was a "pleasure to formalize our partnership with ECOWAS".

Among those in attendance at the signing ceremony were Nigeria's Ambassador to the European Union, Ambassador Usman Baraya, the Director General of the Customs Administration of Niger, Hajiya Zeinab Idrissa, the Director of the Abidjan-based Regional Office for Capacity Building, Mr. Souleymane Sangara, the WCO's Deputy Director in charge of capacity Building, Ms. Heike Barczyk as well as ECOWAS Commissioner for Trade and Customs, Alhaji Mohammed Daramy, his counterpart in charge of Macroeconomic Policy, Professor N'Galadjo Bamba, his colleague responsible for Infrastructure, Mr. Celestin Talaki and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Major General Mahamane Toure.

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