

WCO PICARD Conference 2011

UN Headquarters, Geneva, 14 September 2011

Opening Remarks by WCO Secretary General, Kunio Mikuriya

I should begin by thanking the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) for offering these prestigious UN facilities in Geneva and the Cross-border Research Association (CBRA) for organizing the conference in close collaboration with the International Network of Customs Universities (INCUI), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland (SECO) and the Swiss Federal Customs Administration.

The annual PICARD Conferences held since 2006 aim to promote high level exchange on Customs education and professionalism and to encourage more research into topics relevant to Customs in cooperation with universities and research institutes.

At last year's conference in Abu Dhabi I announced the 2011 theme for International Customs Day as "Knowledge, a Catalyst for Customs Excellence". It was therefore a great pleasure for me to see the increased number and quality of research proposals on the four conference topics, namely Coordinated Border Management, Measurement of Customs Performance, Economic Security and Poverty Reduction and Integrity.

Now I would like to reflect on this year's conference in relation to recent global events. Over the last weekend many people commemorated the 10th anniversary of September 11 in the United States and elsewhere in the world. In Brussels I attended an interfaith commemoration ceremony at the main cathedral where members of Royal Family, the government of Belgium and the diplomatic corps were present. While listening to the observations of religious leaders representing Christians, Jews and Muslims, I thought about the implications of September 11 on the global Customs community that has subsequently undergone a profound change.

In its efforts to help Customs managers understand the change in environment in which Customs now operates, particularly higher security concerns, and to manage the change in Customs' role, the WCO refocused on the need for research and professional education. Obviously today's conference is of great relevance.

As you are well aware, the global Customs community immediately embarked on work to address the security and facilitation of the international supply chain and finally adopted the SAFE Framework of Standards at the WCO Council in 2005. Since then we have put our resources into assisting our Members with research-based capacity building in responding to the change that the attacks on September 11 brought through the implementation of the SAFE Framework. It is always with a sense of pride that I recall the progress in Customs thinking and preparedness over the past 10 years.

The SAFE Framework is supported by two pillars of partnership, namely Customs-to-Customs network arrangements and Customs-business partnerships, two invaluable sources of information and intelligence for risk management purposes. To provide more substance to these two pillars, we are working on Globally Networked Customs to strengthen the first pillar and we chose the second pillar as the theme of last year's International Customs Day.

However, in further implementing SAFE, many WCO Members acknowledged the need for another partnership with other government agencies involved in border regulations. Subsequently, sharing information and intelligence with other agencies through Coordinated Border Management, or CBM in short, was identified as one of the building blocks in the Customs in the 21st Century document in 2008. The Risk management Compendium

presented to this year's Council reemphasizes this point. Our current assignment of enhancing air cargo security together with civil aviation authorities is a good example.

Of course CBM is not limited to the security area, but it greatly supports efficient border procedures in general, involving a plethora of laws and regulations related to trade. This is one of the elements that the WTO Doha Development Agenda is tackling here in Geneva under the trade facilitation negotiations. On the Customs side, we have been developing tools to provide technical support. These include the Single Window Compendium in line with UN Recommendations and the Data Model, both of which enable Customs to offer a valuable service of connecting all government agencies with business at borders. However, as practitioners on the ground we need to know more about what kind of best practices we can collect in terms of operational standards and organizational arrangements to improve coordination, cooperation and collaboration at borders. I look forward to hearing more from this conference.

While many administrations are improving their performance, it is essential to show the proof. Otherwise, it would be increasingly difficult to justify the use of resources in front of tax payers, either through securing national budgets or aid money. This is also relevant to our activities as we endeavor to base our capacity building assistance on measurable indicators. In this connection, there was an interesting debate at the 3rd Global Review of Aid for Trade Ministerial Meeting held this July at the WTO. One session was about performance measurement of aid, but participants had difficulties in agreeing on the feasibility of measuring the effectiveness of donor money. Indeed there are so many factors outside aid that can affect performance. Therefore the WTO and the OECD went for case stories rather than showing the result by commonly agreed indicators. This issue was also taken up in May at the WCO Capacity Building Committee, which decided to focus on performance of Customs and collect the performance indicators used by our Members. This work will also give us a basis for evaluating capacity building performance. Again, I look forward to hearing your stories in performance measurement. Needless to say, it is well recognized that the WCO has its Time Release Study Guide that provides evaluation based on facts.

Another event that I followed over the last weekend was the G8 initiative – the Deauville Partnership to support the change in the Middle East and North Africa, based on a political pillar and an economic one. Following the political pillar established in May, the economic pillar was launched last weekend to support home grown strategies for sustainable and inclusive growth. Naturally one of its focused areas is the cross-border trade facilitation and infrastructure programme, including the removal of barriers to trade and investment. This is a good example of what society expects from Customs in the area of economic security and poverty reduction, which is one of the four topics for this conference that I wish to learn more about from your research.

I keep close contact with Customs in the North Africa and Middle East region to provide more assistance, and like many other regions they often identify integrity as the first priority to readdress Customs reform. I welcome this prioritization, as Customs could become a showcase for good governance to avoid the path to a fragile state. I will be happy to hear your thoughts based on your experience in this respect.

In conclusion, all the topics in this conference are current issues for the global Customs community and your research and professional education will be of great help for us to understand and think about our future. I wish you fruitful outcome from this conference.

Thank you for your attention.