

Inaugural INCU Global Conference
"Trade Facilitation Post-Bali: Putting Policy into Practice"
21-23 May 2014, Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan

**Opening Address by H.E. Ambassador Roberto Azevêdo, Director-General, World
Trade Organization**
21 May 2014

Hello everyone, I am sorry I cannot be with you today, but I am honoured to be asked to send you this message and I want to start by thanking INCU and the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for organising this important and timely conference.

Through academic research and debate the INCU strives to help the people who make the big decisions in Customs to formulate strategies and policies. This is important work and it has never been more relevant.

With trade growth still sluggish after the financial crisis you can make a real contribution by helping trade to flow more smoothly and efficiently. The Trade Facilitation Agreement which was agreed in Bali last December will help you in this task and I believe this agreement is a real breakthrough and represents a transformative moment for the WTO and a boost for the global economy. And I think it demonstrates perfectly the significance of your work. It shows the centrality of Customs to the state of the economy and therefore to the health, wealth and happiness of us all. By streamlining and standardising customs processes, economists think that the Trade Facilitation Agreement will have a major impact. Estimates of the gains range up to \$1 trillion accruing to both developing and developed countries, but with the lion's share going to the poorest.

Therefore your work to support the effective implementation is both helpful and welcome and in my view essential. And I know that members of the INCU have been actively involved for many years in research that supports the facilitation of trade. As early as 2007, INCU President Professor David Widdowson was working closely with the WTO to develop the first version of WTO Trade Facilitation Self-Assessment Guide. This guide was used by approximately 100 developing and least developed countries to assess their trade facilitation needs and priorities which enable them to participate more effectively in the WTO Trade Facilitation negotiations. In fact, as never before, they were central to the whole process. This is just one example of your excellent work and I think this conference is another.

I wish the INCU and the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan every success for this event. I am very interested in seeing the outcomes which I am confident will be useful to our members as we move into the critical phase of putting the new WTO Trade Facilitation agreement into practice.

Thank you very much and I wish you a productive and enjoyable few days.