

## Communiqué

The Solomon Islands Customs and Excise Division hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Customs Heads of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) from 30 April to 4 May 2007. Mr Daniel Rofeta, the Comptroller of Solomon Islands Customs and Excise Division chaired the Conference.

The Conference theme during the week was ***“Enhancing Secure Trade and Travel in Oceania”***

The Conference was attended by twenty two of the twenty three member administrations. There were delegates from American Samoa, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Guam, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Northern Marianas, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna.

Staff from the OCO Secretariat attended the Conference along with representatives of the invited observer organisations including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC), the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC), the World Customs Organization Regional Office of Capacity Building (WCO ROCB), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), DHL and the anti money laundering teams (AMLAT), PALP and APG.

The Prime Minister Hon. Manasseh Sogavare formally opened the Conference and welcomed delegates and observers to the Solomon Islands. In his opening address the Prime Minister noted the important role that Customs performs in the region. He noted that the role of Customs was changing into areas other than revenue collection such as border management, trade facilitation and security. He also noted the importance of Customs contribution to economic growth and prosperity, poverty reduction and securing borders against the threat of illegal substances, such as drugs, and the threat of terrorism. The security provided helps make destinations in the region attractive to tourism and investment. He commended the work of the OCO in the region.

On behalf of the outgoing Chair Tevita Banuve, Head of Fiji Delegation Parmod Achary noted that the signing of the Statement of Principles between the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the OCO in November 2006 was a significant achievement. The Conference noted the work by the OCO Secretariat in pursuing and finalising this initiative which has greatly enhanced the working relationship between the WCO and OCO.

The Conference discussed the High Level Declaration and administrations were encouraged to pursue signing with respective Ministers as a matter of priority.

The Conference noted and congratulated Fiji and Vanuatu for having finalised High Level Declarations within their respective countries. During the Conference the Hon Gordon Darcy Lilo, Minister of Finance and Treasury signed the High Level Declaration for the Solomon Islands.

The Conference adopted a new Pacific Islands Integrity Declaration.

A workshop on the WCO Framework of Standards was conducted and was attended by members of the Solomon Island's business community. In relation to trade facilitation and trade security the Conference noted the importance of the work of National Trade Facilitation Committees within the region and the need for private sector engagement. The Conference noted the importance of Customs automation as a mechanism to facilitate trade and in Customs administration in areas of border management, risk management and security and the progress of the Regional Trade Facilitation Programme.

The Conference noted the requirements to strengthen border cash reporting systems and to respond to the threat of trade based money laundering and endorsed a resolution to progress initiatives with APG, PALP and AMLAT.

The Conference noted the importance of conducting diagnostic missions for capacity building and gap analysis and recognised the review of Customs legislation as a priority action item. It noted that this was the key to achieving the outcomes of initiatives identified.

In endorsing strategic priorities, the strategic plan for 2007/2009 and the OCO work plan for 2007, the Conference identified the importance of these mechanisms to the Pacific Plan.

The Conference accepted a proposal from Australia, through coordination by the OCO Secretariat, for members to consider a "pilot" partnership programme with industry focussing on border and community protection. It also adopted a paper from that Service regarding twinning arrangements and agreed that requests for such arrangements and training in general, also be coordinated by the OCO Secretariat.

The Conference agreed to explore accredited tertiary courses with various institutions and requested the OCO Secretariat to investigate this.

## **Closing**

The Conference accepted the offer of Republic of the Marshall Islands to host the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in 2008 and the offer of Vanuatu to host the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in 2009.

Delegates expressed their gratitude to the people of Solomon Islands and the staff of the Solomon Islands Customs and Excise Division, who had all been instrumental in making this a most productive and enjoyable Conference.

**Daniel Rofeta, Chairman OCO  
Solomon Islands  
4 May 2007**