

Communiqué

The Marshall Islands Customs Service hosted the 10th Annual Conference of Customs (OCO) from 28 April to 02 May 2008. Mr Casten Nemra, Chief Secretary of the Marshall Islands Government chaired the Conference.

The Conference theme during the week was “**Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Capacity Building**”.

The Conference was attended by eighteen of the twenty three member administrations. Delegates from American Samoa, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Guam, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Northern Marianas, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu represented their respective administrations.

Staff from the OCO Secretariat attended the Conference along with representatives of the invited observer organisations including China Customs, Japan Customs, Canada Border Services Agency, 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 (WCO), the United Nations Office Drug Control (UNODC), Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF(W)), United States Coastguard, DHL and the anti money laundering teams AMLAT and PALP.

The Hon Minister Amenta Matthew, Acting Minister of Finance, on behalf of His Excellency President Litokwa Tomeing, formally opened the Conference and welcomed delegates and observers to the Marshall Islands. The Minister noted the importance of Customs in the region and that the Customs role extended wider than revenue collection into other equally important roles of community protection and border security. She also noted the theme of the conference and believed that much progress takes place when working cooperatively towards a common purpose. The Minister commended the work of the WCO, working cooperatively with the OCO, in recognising the value to enhance capacity in especially small administrations in the region.

The outgoing Chair, Daniel Rofeta, the Comptroller of Solomon Islands Customs and Excise Division informed delegates that the relationship developed by the OCO with the WCO and that organisation's Regional Office of Capacity Building was already bearing fruit for all members of the OCO and not just those who are members of the WCO in their own right. The conference noted the WCO workshops held in the region and their importance to Customs modernisation and reform.

The Conference noted and congratulated the Head of Secretariat for OCO achievements during the past year. These included progression of areas of mutual interest in the Statement of Principles, assistance to members in implementing their border cash reporting regimes, involvement of the OCO in fraudulent document training and the negotiation of a Declaration of Intent with the WCO to implement the Columbus

Programme. The Conference further noted the significant importance of the Programme and the wide spread capacity building benefits available to all OCO members that would align with international standards.

The Conference recognised the importance of implementing border cash regimes and endorsed the OCO continuing to work closely with the anti money laundering organisations to assist members where required. The Conference also noted the important work that was being progressed to coordinate and better utilise air and maritime surveillance assets through multi tasking and deployment to meet interagency objectives and to improve regional security. This would be achieved through interagency cooperation at both the regional and national level. The Conference noted the detailed report on the security risk of pleasure craft in the region. It further noted a report on the security risk posed by cruise ships through increasing numbers and size of craft, including their carrying capacity of passengers and crew, and the impact that this would have on law enforcement.

The Conference noted the developing relationship between the OCO and the Caribbean Law Enforcement Council and the intention to formalize the relationship through a Co-operative Arrangement.

The Conference considered and endorsed terms of reference to undertake a regional threat assessment on Customs offending including activities of transnational crime. Intellectual property rights was identified as a subject for Customs to develop appropriate cross border responses. The Conference further noted and supported the implementation of measures to monitor the cross border flow of precursor chemicals and for members to actively participate in Project Prism.

The Conference endorsed the implementation of measures for customs modernisation and reform applying to trade facilitation and security. It noted a report on the progress made with the Customs components within the Regional Trade Facilitation Programme. The Conference noted that the OCO was working cooperatively and collaboratively with PIFS on a review of targeting customs services at the subregional level following a Forum Economic Ministers' directive.

The Conference encouraged all members to actively inform Governments and Ministers of the importance of the work being undertaken by the OCO in the region in the areas of trade facilitation revenue collection, community protection and security.

Closing

The Conference accepted the offer of Vanuatu to host the 11th Annual Conference in 2009, the offer of Samoa to host the 12th Annual Conference in 2010 and the further offer from Papua New Guinea to host in 2011.

Delegates expressed their gratitude to the President, His Excellency Litokwa Tomeing, Government and people of the Republic of Marshall Islands and the staff of the Republic of Marshall Islands Customs who had been instrumental in making this a most productive and enjoyable Conference.

Casten Nemra, Chairman OCO
Marshall Islands
2 May 2008