

Communiqué

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Annual Conference met in Port Vila, Vanuatu from 4 – 8 May 2009. Mr Ben Wotu Leeshi Director of Vanuatu Customs and Inland Revenue chaired the Conference.

The Conference theme during the week was ***“Customs in the 21st Century”***.

Customs administrations represented included Australia, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Wallis and Futuna and Vanuatu. Observers comprised representatives from Canada, Japan, Timor-Leste, International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (Pacific Plant Organisation), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the World Customs Organisation (WCO), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC), IPR AP, Joint Inter Agency Task Force West, Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC), PRIPP, the New Zealand Wildlife Enforcement Group (WEG) and the Pacific Anti Money Laundering Programme (PALP).

The Vanuatu Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Finance in his opening remarks, stressed that Customs in the twenty first century must extend their traditional role of revenue collection. He advised the conference that while the collection of revenue is paramount, border management is becoming a great challenge in all national Customs administrations. Regional meetings such as this forum provide an excellent opportunity for administrators in the region to foster closer ties and exchange knowledge and experiences. Regional responses to the growing complexities of border security within the region is fundamental and should be encouraged.

The Conference welcomed the new Head of Secretariat for the OCO Mr Kulu Bloomfield and commended him for the extensive work undertaken since May 2008. The Conference took account of OCO activities involving the WCO, Intellectual Property Rights, in the Pacific Islands Forum agenda, money laundering, border management and other trade and law enforcement issues.

The Conference noted the progress on the drafting of a model Customs legislation, national responses to money laundering, revenue implications as a result of Free Trade Agreements and other law enforcement programmes of the region. The Conference reaffirmed their commitment in progressing these matters within the Customs environment. The Conference noted with appreciation the support of the PIFS on the work covering the model Customs legislation

The Conference considered that illegal trade in wildlife represents a threat to ecological systems of the Pacific region. It was recognised that legislation and enforcement capacity with respect to the illegal trade in wildlife is largely weak in the

region. Members agreed to start, at a national level, a systematic approach to addressing the matter by engaging with relevant agencies and NGOs Members.

The Conference agreed to the following outcomes from the Wildlife workshop:

1. Wildlife trade presents a threat to ecological systems in the region;
2. Legislation, Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) membership and enforcement capacity is by and large weak in the region;
3. Lack of Customs awareness and political will needs addressing;
4. Wildlife enforcement capacity building is a need for the region;
5. The OCO is a platform that can coordinate such capacity building in the region;
6. Mandatory CRIN reporting for OCO countries; and
7. A monitoring system for the movement of vessels, yachts and pleasure craft in the region should be established.

The Conference also noted an updated report on the security risk posed by pleasure craft in the region. The Conference undertook to work towards reviewing and harmonising the laws and procedures surrounding small craft movements in the Pacific region.

The Conference considered the results of the regional threat assessment study commissioned last year. It noted that commercial and revenue fraud are high in many countries and called for OCO Members and the commercial operators to take measures to arrest this malpractice.

On the Intellectual Property Rights issue, the Conference noted that the trade posed by counterfeit medicines is a direct threat to public health and consumer safety. Measures to combat this trade were also considered.

The conference agreed to the following workshop outcomes:

1. It was recognised that the trade in counterfeit goods presents a clear and present danger to public health safety;
2. Members must address the trade in counterfeit goods by engaging with relevant agencies;
3. Members appoint a national contact on IPR issues;
4. Members develop with relevant agencies a national strategy to combat the trade in counterfeit medicines; and
5. There is a need for a strong legislative framework supported by an appropriate training and awareness package.

The Conference reaffirmed its commitment towards Customs modernisation and reform applying to trade facilitation and security. They stressed their confidence in the capacity building measures being pursued by Members. The conference noted a report on the progress made with the Customs component of the Regional Trade Facilitation Programme. It also noted that the OCO had worked cooperatively and collaboratively with Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on a targeted Customs services study following a Forum Economic Ministers' directive.

The Conference was encouraged with the trade facilitation work programme being delivered by the Secretariat and recognised that a substantial amount of resources will be required to ensure the success of the programme. The establishment of National Trade Facilitation Committee or like bodies was reaffirmed.

Closing

The Conference accepted the offer of Samoa to host the 12th Annual Conference in 2010, and the offer of Papua New Guinea to host the 13th Annual Conference in 2011.

Delegates expressed their gratitude to the Government of Vanuatu and the Vanuatu Department of Customs and Inland Revenue for a most productive and enjoyable Conference.

Ben Wotu Leeshi, Chairman OCO
Port Vila, Vanuatu
8 May 2009