



Communiqué

The Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority (FIRCA) hosted the 8th Annual Conference of Customs Heads of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) from the 13th to the 17th of March 2006. Mr Tevita Banuve, the Chief Executive of FIRCA chaired the Conference.

The Conference was attended by eighteen of the twenty-three member administrations. There were thirty-three delegates from Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, the Republic of Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, the Kingdom of Tonga, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna.

Three staff from the OCO Secretariat attended the Conference along with representatives of the invited observer organisations including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC), the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (PPPO), the Pacific Trans-national Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC), the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the World Customs Organisation Asia-Pacific Regional Vice-Chair (WCO AP VC) and the WCO Regional Intelligence Office Asia-Pacific (WCO RILO AP).

The Fiji Minister of Finance and National Planning, Ratu Jone Yavala Kubabola formally opened the conference and welcomed delegates and observers to Fiji and to the Conference, noting that the world has changed significantly in recent times with the need for strengthening trade security and combating trans-national crime in the Pacific and progressing regional cooperation regarding the economies and security of Pacific Island Countries.

The OCO Vice-Chair, Mr David Sode, expanded on this theme by referring to the particular customs challenges facing national Customs administrations in the region, such as the increasing complexity of trade, travel and law enforcement.

Mr Michel Danet, the Secretary General of the World Customs Organisation, gave an address covering issues facing all Customs administrations. Mr Danet's presentation focussed on the impact of globalisation and the importance of balancing the need to collect revenue, facilitate trade and travel and strengthening security through securing the supply chain. Mr Danet also suggested the current WCO global standards regarding trade security and capacity building may provide a guide for Customs Administrations worldwide to implement modernisation programmes.

The 2006 Conference focussed on the following key issues:

1. Future funding for the OCO;
2. Assessment of the Customs Component of the Regional Trade Facilitation Programme; and
3. The relocation of the OCO Secretariat from New Caledonia to Fiji.

1. Future Funding of the OCO

The Conference discussed a variety of options for the future funding of the OCO Secretariat and recommended the OCO Steering Committee task a funding sub-committee to consider a variety of options including donor funding and member contributions.

2. Year One Assessment of Implementation of the Customs Component of the RTFP

Mr Kulu Bloomfield, Customs Trade Facilitation Officer (CTFO) updated the Conference on progress of the Customs component of the RTFP and included:

- Integrity;
- Risk Management;
- Best Practice Principle / Revised Kyoto Convention;
- Adoption of the Harmonized Coding System;
- Adoption of the WTO Valuation Agreement; and
- Legislative updates.

During the course of his presentation Mr Bloomfield also outlined the funding implications of the Customs component of the RTFP.

3. The Relocation and Establishment of the Permanent OCO Secretariat

The Conference was updated on the development of the relocation of the OCO Secretariat from Nouméa to Suva.

Signing of the Headquarters Arrangement with the Government of Fiji establishing the OCO Secretariat with legal and formal status occurred on 15th March.

The New Secretariat Office located within the SPC Compound in Suva was officially opened by the Secretary General of the WCO, Mr Michel Danet on Thursday, 16th of March. Delegates witnessed the unveiling of the commemorative plaque and the raising of the OCO Flag.

Other activities and issues discussed by the Conference in 2006 focussed on the four key areas for the OCO:

- Trade Facilitation/Revenue Collection;
- Law Enforcement;
- Modernisation/Capacity Building; and
- Representation and Communication.

Conference delegates were updated by OCO Members: The Cook Islands; The Solomon Islands; Fiji Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea and the Kingdom of Tonga on current modernization projects. Observers and Regional Organisations: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat ;IMF; PFTAC; UNCTAD; RILO A/P; PTCCC; ACS; PICP; PIDC; PPPO and the SPC also presented on current trends and issues facing the region.

OCO Annual Work Plan

Members agreed to an updated OCO Work-Plan for 2006 to reflect the outcomes of the Conference. They noted that a new Strategic Plan would need to be developed in 2007, and that this was good timing given the establishment of the new OCO Secretariat Office in Suva.

Closing

The Conference accepted the offer of the Solomon Islands to host the 9th OCO Annual Conference in March 2007 and of the Marshall Islands to host the 10th Annual Conference in 2008.

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

Tevita Banuve, Chairman OCO
Fiji
17 March 2006