

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cook Islands PM Calls for Collaboration Across Oceania Customs Agencies at 26th Annual Conference

Monday 29 July 2024, RAROTONGA

The 26th Annual Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Conference commenced today with a call for innovation and collaboration across customs agencies throughout Oceania. Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown emphasised the urgency of regional cooperation in safeguarding the region's future.

“Customs agencies play an indispensable role in promoting and facilitating trade, safeguarding our borders, and generating revenue for our governments,” said Prime Minister Brown. “I am confident that this meeting will be a catalyst for meaningful collaboration and transformative action.”

In his opening day speech, the Prime Minister addressed several key challenges faced by customs agencies in the region, including the increasing need to strengthen border security against criminal networks using the Pacific as a conduit for the transshipment of hard drugs into the markets of New Zealand and Australia.

“We must work hand-in-hand – sharing information, expertise and resources, to disrupt drug trafficking routes, dismantle criminal networks, and safeguard our communities,” he said. The Prime Minister also spoke on the role of customs agencies in facilitating trade and optimising revenue collection, while acknowledging that “dis-economies of scale and the high costs of compliance to international financial and regulatory authorities make doing business tough in our part of the world”.

OCO Chairperson Rachael Goodwin recognised the organisation’s significant achievements in border security, disrupting criminal networks and promoting gender equality. She also highlighted the need for ongoing vigilance and adaptability in the face of evolving threats.

OCO Head of Secretariat Nancy T Oraka outlined the organisation’s commitment to strengthening Pacific customs administrations through various initiatives, including:

- Developing a new generation of professionals with a focus on empowering women.
- Enhancing collaboration and intelligence exchange through the Information Sharing Working Group.
- Implementing the Harmonized System and Asycuda World for trade facilitation.
- Launching a Customs Brokers Online Training program to boost revenue collection.
- Conducting in-depth reviews of WTO agreements and risk management frameworks.

Ms. Oraka reaffirmed OCO's dedication to enhancing border security, facilitating trade, and building resilient customs administrations across the Pacific.

The OCO Conference will continue with discussions on a broad range of topics, including border security, trade facilitation, gender equality, climate change and transnational crime.

ENDS



Ms. Nancy T. Oraka
Head of Secretariat



Ms. Rachel Goodwin
Comptroller and Chairperson of OCO Steering Committee