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Commissioner's speech at the Occasion of the Official Launch of the Dubai Customs Reform and Modernisation Program

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem
Director-General Al Mazrooei
Directors-General of the Emirates customs administrations
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It is my privilege to participate in the official launch of the Dubai customs reform and modernisation program. I wish to thank the Dubai Customs Administration for extending an invitation to me to participate in this very important occasion.

The case for customs reform and modernisation is self-evident. As customs administrations we are continuously faced with new challenges and complexities that impact on our functions and that shape our policy and operational environments. Some of the major challenges that we are faced with are:

- Globalization and the continued growth and changing profile of international trade;
- the need to secure international trade supply chains;
- pressures from Governments and the private sector to expedite the movement of goods; and
- finally, the demands posed by e-commerce and the opportunities presented by information and communication technology for streamlining and improving customs procedures.

Recent years have also witnessed the proliferation of new multilateral and regional trading rules that customs are expected to administer. On the enforcement side, we are also faced with a new set of complexities associated with sophisticated techniques employed by international smuggling and money laundering syndicates.

As a result of these drivers of change there has been a growing realization of the importance of sound customs administration to the economic and social prospects of countries. A well-performing customs administration is a national asset as it can make a major contribution to effective revenue mobilization and can assist governments to facilitate trade and investment. It also increases confidence in the quality and integrity of government institutions. A modern, efficient and effective customs administration is a key contributor to national socio-economic development.

Committing sufficient resources to reform and modernise customs is a sound and cost-effective economic investment for governments. It can enable a customs administration to make a meaningful contribution to a range of national development objectives. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, also currently meeting in Dubai, are recognising the valuable role and contribution of customs administrations in national development and fighting poverty. It is critical that we engage with these institutions and create close working relationships between them and the World Customs Organization to mobilise support for customs reform and modernisation.

The World Customs Organization, as the global centre of customs expertise, strives to play a central role in the development, promotion and implementation of modern and secure customs systems and procedures. Over the past few years we have adopted a number of key initiatives that jointly aim to contribute to efficient and effective customs administration. Three of these initiatives are the new strategic planning process, the revised Kyoto Convention and a comprehensive capacity building strategy. These three initiatives will ensure that the WCO and its Members remain in the vanguard in anticipating and responding to the complex and demanding challenges that we are confronted with.

The WCO is proud to be associated with Dubai Customs and to have been able to play a role in assisting with the development of its customs reform and modernisation program. One of the key components of the new WCO capacity building strategy is a diagnostics toolkit. Dubai Customs was one of the first customs administrations in which this toolkit was used to benchmark its policies and procedures against international customs standards. The success with which this diagnostics toolkit was used in Dubai will also encourage other customs administrations to use the WCO's capacity building strategy and tools in their reform and modernisation efforts.

I wish to congratulate the Government, the Ports Customs and Free Zones Corporation and Dubai Customs for their vision in embarking on and investing in the customs reform and modernisation program. Your commitment and efforts will position Dubai Customs as a model for other administrations in your own region and internationally.

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