

21st Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of
Landlocked Developing Countries
22 September 2022

Theme: Accelerating implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and building momentum towards the Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

Draft talking points for a 3-minute intervention

Excellencies, distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure and honor for me to speak at the 21st Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of LLDCs, and I would like to express my most sincere thanks to the LLDC Chair (Botswana) and the UN for inviting me to participate in this important gathering that prepares for the third UN Conference on LLDCs.
2. The World Customs Organization or WCO has been contributing to the LLDC matters from the outset, believing that LLDCs should be the biggest beneficiaries of trade and transport facilitation efforts.
3. I remember addressing the First UN Conference on LLDCs held in Almaty, Kazakhstan back in 2003 where I stressed the importance of using international standards, such as the WCO's "International Convention for Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures," known as the Revised Kyoto Convention or RKC, to enhance connectivity at borders.
4. Our vision is "Borders divide, Customs connects," and for this purpose the WCO develops standards for Customs procedures, promote Customs cooperation and provide capacity building support to Member Customs.
5. In this way, we support Customs in ensuring revenue collection, trade facilitation and protection of borders from illicit trade.

6. At the Second UN Conference on LLDCs held in Vienna in 2014, promising that the WCO would remain committed to support LLDCs, I launched the WCO Transit Handbook as a concrete example.
7. The support for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action or VPoA is natural for the WCO, because all 32 LLDCs are its Members.
8. Since 2014, the progress has been made, evidenced by the increase in the number of Contracting Parties to the RKC from 15 to 23, including Central Asia as I mentioned, reaching 72% of LLDCs.
9. In addition to the RKC provisions on Customs transit and the Transit Handbook, the WCO has developed the Transit Guidelines in 2017 and the Compendium of best practices in the area of transit in 2020.
10. The Transit Guidelines answers the question HOW to implement efficient and effective transit regimes.
11. The Compendium of best practices in the area of transit illustrates in practical terms how individual Members have implemented the guiding principles for efficient and effective transit regimes outlined in the Transit Guidelines.
12. It contains a total number of 34 good practices, such as the Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System deployed in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and the DRC and the initiative for interconnectivity of Customs IT systems in West Africa.
13. They are also measures relevant to mitigate the ill effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and more generally any other public health emergency or natural disaster by promoting paperless trade.
14. As these examples show, the WCO provides support not only in transit policy area, but also in the area of deployment of technology, including Information and Communication Technology.

15. The WCO has continued to work on various aspects of transit and recently launched its Railway Guidance which is aimed at harmonizing the Customs procedures in railway transportation.
16. We are investing efforts in developing a harmonized dataset for Customs transit by rail based on the WCO Data Model.
17. In terms of capacity building, the WCO's priority has been providing support to Customs Members in implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement or TFA.
18. According to the Communication from the group of LLDCs, they are still lagging behind in the implementation of a number of articles of the TFA with implementation rates below 40%.
19. Therefore, the WCO continues to provide capacity building support to LLDCs with its instruments and expertise in various areas of the TFA through the WCO Mercator Programme.
20. Let me talk some of the focus areas of the WCO, which are surely relevant to LLDCs.
21. With the digitalization of economy, we have more access to data, including those related to border-crossing that Customs collects from traders and Customs seizure records on illicit trade that poses health and security risks.
22. Consequently, the WCO has launched this year the Data Strategy as we consider it necessary to provide useful information to governments and business by analyzing data.
23. One existing example is Time Release Study or TRS that Customs and its partners could identify bottlenecks at borders and the way to reduce delays by analyzing data on time needed for each step of procedures.
24. The WCO recommends the implementation of TRS along transit corridor of LLDCs by inviting other government agencies and the private sector to

join as they potentially contribute to untangling delays and hold the key to improvement.

25. Likewise, the WCO has been working on how best to manage risks of e-commerce that has recently shown exponential growth, but the solution should come from collecting and analyzing advance electronic data from the relevant business and the use of technology.
26. Another area of our focus is how best Customs could contribute to Sustainable Development Goals by greening supply chains, including controlling environmentally hazardous goods and supporting circular economy.
27. As the implementation of international standards and the use of technology depends on human resources, the WCO's capacity building support increasingly centers on institutional development of Customs, including gender equality and diversity.
28. These new focus areas and the lessons learned from the implementation of the VPoA would form the basis for reviewing and renewing the framework for international support for LLDCs.
29. The WCO commit itself to joining our partners present here in support of LLDCs in line with the SDGs and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.