

*Opening remarks by Kunio Mikuriya, WCO Secretary General elect*

Good morning.

I would like to join Mr Mike Eland, Director General of UK Customs, in welcoming the Global Dialogue participants to the headquarters of the International Coffee Organization, which reminds us of the great tradition and history of international trade. I should also like to express my sincere thanks to UK Customs, especially to Mr Doug Twedde and his team for preparing this forum in close cooperation with WCO staff. This is a significant event in the life of the WCO as capacity building remains a top priority for the Organization's new management. The presence of WCO Council Chairperson, Martyn Dunne, and representatives of all WCO Vice-Chairs and WCO Regional Offices for Capacity Building as well as numerous heads of customs administrations shows the importance of this meeting.

We are currently experiencing a credit crisis of an extraordinary scale which risks destabilising the global financial system. If we learn from history, we have to be mindful of another infrastructure of world economic activity, namely the international trading system where Customs plays an essential role in securing and facilitating the smooth flow of legitimate trade. We know that in 1930, following the Wall Street crash, the US Congress passed the Smooth-Hawley Tariff Act, significantly exacerbating the Great Depression with a trade barrier. Recent failure to reach a deal for the Doha Development Round sent a worrisome message although many people, including myself, remain hopeful for a final deal to be achieved in due course.

Despite this somewhat gloomy landscape, the customs community continues to make every effort to move forward with a new vision for the 21st Century. Customs administrations all over the world envision themselves operating as an international network, in close coordination with other border agencies and in close cooperation with the business community. This endeavour requires the use of risk management and other modern working methods as well as technology based on internationally accepted standards and best practice, which the customs community developed and maintain through the WCO.

In order to move towards realising this vision and to implement these standards, many customs administrations are engaged in capacity building, embracing a professional and service-orientated culture and ensuring the value of integrity. However, we recognise the deficiency in understanding and support at the political level for customs' role and contribution to revenue collection, economic development through the promotion of trade and investment, protection of society, and providing security. We also recognise the gap inside customs administrations at both management and technical levels. In addressing this deficiency and gap, the WCO launched the Columbus Programme to undertake diagnostic missions; in the past two and a half years, over one hundred customs administrations have been visited and a snapshot taken of each administration in order to analyse the gap and formulate recommendations, because accurate diagnosis is the basis of capacity building activities. The WCO will continue this work and move on to enhance advocacy of customs by providing research-based knowledge, success stories and lessons learned, as well as technical and capacity building assistance for customs management and officers.

We identified that one of the key issues for sustainable delivery of capacity building is the promotion of ownership and leadership where the WCO provides the necessary tools, support and research. In this connection, we also encourage a regional approach by supporting Regional Offices for Capacity Building and other regional structures. Another key issue for sustainable delivery is partnership with other international organisations, lending institutions, donors and the private sector. These partnerships will provide us with political, financial and knowledge support. Obviously this conference is of great relevance to these two key components.

Today we are fortunate to have prominent speakers to kick off the discussion. At the first session we will hear the views of donors. Whereas we share the same goal of poverty reduction and sound economic and social development, each donor has its own agenda, strength and priority, driven by its taxpayers. The

customs community should understand this reality and jointly explore ways to find a linkage between customs needs and funding resources. In the second half of the morning session we will listen to examples of partnerships with lending institutions at the regional level and reflect on the way forward for developing the delivery mode. In the afternoon we will listen to the experience of customs administrations on their reform initiatives and donor support. Finally, we will hear the views of the private sector and an example of coordinated border management where other border agencies are involved.

I welcome participation from the floor especially the exchange and development of ideas, which will be reported to the WCO Policy Commission at its December 2008 meeting. They will enrich the WCO's current debate on Customs in the 21st Century and set the next steps for capacity building in Customs. At the same time, I hope that this forum will offer excellent networking opportunities for Customs, donors, business and other partners alike.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a fruitful deliberation.