

WCO has a new Committee for Capacity Building!

*Capacity Building Directorate
World Customs Organization*

The Momentum for Customs Capacity Building is still there and the agenda is strongly endorsed and supported by WCO Members.

Around 300 high-level participants from more than one hundred and twenty countries travelled to Brussels for the historical first session of the new Capacity Building Committee, held from 25–27 September 2010. In addition, more than forty partner and stakeholder organisations from academia, the private sector and the donor community participated as observers at the meeting.

Ministers, ambassadors, commissioners general, commissioners, directors general and other high-level participants discussed the future agenda of capacity building in the World Customs Organization (WCO). The first session was originally planned to be held in April this year but the ash cloud from the Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjallajökull, forced the meeting to be postponed.

The WCO is a committee-structured organisation with much of its work done through committees and working groups. It is rare that new committees are formed and the creation of a Capacity Building Committee is significant. The background is that leaders of the WCO, at the Council session in 2005, decided to implement a new capacity building strategy and set up an organisation to provide implementation support. As a result of this decision, a new Capacity Building Directorate was shaped under the elected Director, Lars Karlsson from Sweden.

The new Directorate was to build an infrastructure for capacity building delivery and at the same time, transfer the strategy into operational programs. This was achieved through a number of initiatives, for example, the Columbus Programme and the PICARD Programme. After five years, all building blocks of the infrastructure have been developed and implemented. The WCO has established and implemented capacity building visions and strategies, operational policies, standard operating procedures (SOP), a donor network platform, a language fund, and a regional structure with six regional offices for capacity building (ROCB) and twenty-two regional training centres (RTC). The migration of the previous High Level Working Group to a fully fledged permanent WCO committee was a historical landmark taking the topic of capacity building from being a development project to a prioritised day-to-day business line of the WCO.

At the meeting in Brussels, Canada was elected chair of the Capacity Building Committee with China as Vice Chair. Three major themes emerged, the importance of *People, Partnerships* and *Political will* (3P). The delegations stressed the need for leadership, strategic planning, coordination and evaluation at all levels for successful delivery of capacity building on the ground. Three new WCO initiatives were launched: the WCO Management Programme, the new e-learning platform and the first ever Fellowship program in Spanish.

The Committee, under the able leadership of Chris Henderson, Director General, International and Partnerships Directorate, Canada Border Services Agency, developed a roadmap for the way forward, including tangible deliverables. Before the next session of the Committee, to be held in May 2011, a number of concrete initiatives/activities are expected based on requests raised by Members and stakeholders, for example, a model career development plan, a model for documentation of best practice examples, more research on customs reform and modernisation (case studies), pilot joint private sector-

customs capacity building initiatives, participation in the Aid-for-Trade initiative, organisation of a WCO ministerial event to raise the profile of the agenda, development of a WCO C21 capacity building package for decision-makers, and the development of capacity building evaluation indicators. Further development and implementation of the WCO Management Development Programme, based on the PICARD professional standards, is also expected.

It was agreed that Result Based Management and performance measurement will be top priorities on the Committee's agenda, starting with cooperation with academia at the WCO 2010 PICARD conference to be held in Abu Dhabi in November. Many delegations, in solidarity with the overall aims of the agenda, pledged continued financial and human resource support for the WCO capacity building programs and activities.

Helen Clark, Administrator Head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Chair of the UN Development Group, a committee consisting of the heads of all UN funds, programs and departments working on development issues, came directly to the Committee meeting from the successful 2010 Millennium Development Review Summit held in New York the week before. In her keynote speech on the progress achieved in New York, Mrs Clark stated:

I was delighted to learn some months ago that the World Customs Organization was looking at how its work could help the achievement of the MDGs. In my view, it can help a great deal. For the MDGs to be met, countries' economies will need to grow sustainably and revenue will need to be collected from that for investments in services and infrastructure. A modern customs service can play a key role in both trade facilitation which is conducive to growth, and revenue collection from it. There is certainly scope for further strengthening linkages between our organisations. I commend the WCO and this Committee for taking its capacity building work seriously, and for developing a number of instruments, programs and tools to enhance customs operations.

Other keynote speeches were delivered by the Jordan Minister of Transport, HE Mr Alaa Batayneh, and the Ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire to Belgium and the European Union, HE Mrs Marie Gosset. A number of Customs Commissioners and Directors General gave presentations about the considerable capacity building progress and results achieved over the last few years in customs reform and modernisation.

In addition, several tripartite capacity building twinning agreements between African countries were signed during the meeting. The tripartite model is a simple but very effective way of structuring capacity building support and cooperation with concrete deliverables and expected outcomes. It is a significant step forward that developing countries, having received support in the first stages of the WCO Columbus Programme, are now transferring their experience to other countries in the region. Africa is building Africa. The model will be promoted to be used more frequently in other parts of the world.

The WCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the South African Customs Union, and Professor David Widdowson was acknowledged for his work in strengthening the partnership between Customs and academia.

Feedback and evaluation surveys from participants showed that the meeting was a great success. There is no doubt that the permanent Capacity Building Committee is already a cornerstone that will make capacity building a priority area within the organisation and that all necessary components are now in place for continued successful capacity building delivery in the future.

As was said about capacity building during the committee meeting:

...capacity building is about reform and modernisation, how to build one's own sustainable capacity to manage change over time. Capacity building is not technical assistance and training, which are important components of development; it is more than that. We are not building a road, but the place the road leads to. Integrity is the way we travel.