

Speaking points for WCO Secretary General

UNECE Inland Transport Committee (ITC)

High-Level Policy Segment on Back to a sustainable future: achieving resilient connectivity for post-COVID-19 sustained recovery and economic growth

Panel I “Leveraging existing international transport connectivity solutions as enablers of economic growth and development: What room for enhanced international agreements?”

1. Thank the UNECE for inviting the WCO to the Inland Transport Committee as Customs works closely with the transport sector to ensure connectivity at the borders.
2. Therefore, exploring the synergies between the work of the UNECE and the WCO contributes to achieving the mandates of both organizations.
3. The WCO with its 183 Member Customs administrations across the globe to: i) develop standards for harmonized Customs procedures; ii) promote cooperation between Customs and with our partners and stakeholders in the public and private sectors; and iii) provide technical and capacity building supports to our Members to implement the global standards and the cooperative approach.
4. Let me share our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic period and our thought about the usefulness of the trade and transport instruments and toolkits under emergency conditions, in particular taking into account regional specific features.
5. At the outset of the crisis, we were aware of the availability of several useful instruments and tools, for example the WCO’s Revised Kyoto Convention or the UNECE’s TIR Convention to name just two.
6. However, we felt the need for quickly developing guidance documents to implement these standards in an adapted manner in the emergency situation.
7. We collected information on national practices from our Members and put them on the WCO website accessible to the public and developed key guidance documents such as classification of essential goods to address the challenges encountered by Customs administrations, essentially to safeguard supply chains at the borders.
8. Also we felt the need to hear directly from the private sector that operates on the ground and set a weekly meeting with our Private Sector Consultative Group or PSCG with its 30 Members to identify problems and explore jointly possible solutions.

9. In response to the difficulties identified by the PSCG, the WCO developed guidance for Customs and business, but the PSCG members increasingly focused on the lack of coordination at the borders, including the aspect of smooth transport.
10. Accordingly we contacted international organizations in the trade and transport area to seek joint actions, including issuing joint statements and letters with the heads of ICAO, IMO, UPU, ICC and WTO to share best practices and enhance cooperation in implementing the instruments and tools of respective organizations.
11. In the area of inland transport we worked with the IRU in the effective implementation of the TIR Convention and the railway organizations to develop standardized dataset based in the same spirit of Coordinated Border Management.
12. Players in the inland transport sectors are important partners as they often play an indispensable role in transit, the area that the WCO has been focusing in response to our 30plus land-locked developing country Members' needs.
13. The WCO Transit Guidelines and its Compendium refers to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries, but also the UN Conventions administered by the Inland Trade Committee to explore the best way to effectively implement them by Customs administrations.
14. With all these actions we learned several lessons in mitigating the effect of COVID-19; that is Collaboration, Digitization and Preparedness.
15. Collaboration on the ground in sharing experiences and seeking solutions jointly is essential in keeping our instruments and toolkits relevant and conducive of their implementation in a flexible and meaningful manner.
16. Digitization of the remaining paper documents at the borders is vital in respecting social distancing at the borders, including the eTIR pilot projects.
17. The Single Window in connecting other border agencies is also critical in this respect and the WCO develops its Data Model as a standardized dataset in close alignment with the international standards managed by the UNECE.
18. Preparedness of people through awareness raising and capacity building is the key to nudge human resources to collaborate more with open mind and embrace technological advances for digitization.

19. As I discussed, the avenues to a sustained recovery are not limited to the development of hard law or conventions; the soft law, or in other words the guidelines on how to implement global standards or best practices, is equally important as they are adaptable to emergency situations.
20. As the WCO works with regional integration, we promote the WCO's instruments and tools as ensuring interconnectedness between regions while we collect regional needs and priorities incorporate in the WCO instrument and tools.
21. And I would like to finish my intervention with the theme we have chosen for 2021 – “Customs bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a sustainable supply chain”.
22. This year is dedicated to the united efforts of Customs to emerge from the coronavirus crisis and support people and businesses by strengthening the global supply chain, reinforcing collaboration, harnessing technology and putting “people” at the centre of the transformation process in supporting sustainable development.

Thank you.

1-2 paragraphs to submit to the moderator of the panel

The statement of the WCO Secretary General will review the role that a standard-setting organization could play in the time of crisis and discuss the lessons learned from the experience. He will explain the importance of consultation with the private sector, collaboration with other international organizations and use of the soft law approach in a flexible and agile manner to address the challenges. Dr. Mikuriya will speak about the role of Customs in bolstering recovery from the crisis by collaboration, digitization in renewal of Customs and trade system and preparedness in making supply chain resilient and sustainable, and therefore the need to work closely with the inland transport sector.