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Royal
Thai Customs



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- 📌 Red Flag Indicators: for wildlife and timber trafficking in containerized sea cargo
- 📌 AEO concept is key to the healthy development of Free Zones
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- 📌 Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs Community

FOREWORD

Dear Readers,

Thank you for taking the time to read this 74th ROCB A/P E-Newsletter.



WCO's new Fiscal Year 2021/22 has begun. Looking at the global situation, the influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic continues. On the other hand, we recognize worldwide efforts of resilience, including vaccine distribution and that societies have been adopting safety practices as the "New Normal".

As for the world wide Customs community, we also observe that WCO Members have been adopting new administrative practices as the "New Normal" and have worked in close cooperation with WCO guidance to ensure the facilitation of legitimate international trade.

Needless to say, ROCB A/P also has put all our efforts into delivering capacity building activities in response to the "New Normal". In the new Fiscal Year 2021/22, ROCB A/P intend to work closely with WCO, Vice Chair and Regional entities to maximize its functions and to build on lessons learnt from the last fiscal year. In taking these opportunities, I would like to ask all stakeholders to provide kind support and cooperation.


This E-Newsletter features activities undertaken by Asia Pacific members in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2021/22, i.e. July through September 2021. In this E-Newsletter, we present a special article from WWF Asia Pacific Counter-Illegal Wildlife Trade Hub, "HOW TO SPOT WILDLIFE SMUGGLING AT SEA". I really appreciate being able to share this article.

In addition, ROCB A/P is now more focused on publications and information sharing which is one of the main functions of ROCB A/P. In this ROCB A/P E-Newsletter, we present several special essays that explain WCO tools and hot topics in a user-friendly and easy-to-understand manner. There are three special essays by the Program Managers of ROCB A/P in this No 74 E-Newsletter, (1) AEO concept is key to the healthy development of Free Zones by Ms. Yuko Mamiya (2) Reviewing online workshops by ROCB A/P by Ms. Grace YE (3) Introduction and elaboration of AEO Mutual Recognition Arrangement/Agreement by Ms. Sherman YU and (4) Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs Community by Ms. Pavida Boonmun. We sincerely hope that ROCB A/P publications will be good reference material for policy officials as well as field officers.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to briefly touch on the personnel changes at ROCB A/P. I am also pleased to be able to welcome Ms. Kanyawarat SITTHIKUN PANIT (Ploy), Program Coordinator from Thai Customs. I would like to extend my warm welcome to Ms. Ploy in joining the ROCB A/P. On behalf of our office, I would like to express my highest appreciation to Thai Customs for continuously seconding experienced officials to ROCB A/P.

The ROCB A/P is always keen to hear any constructive comments and suggestions/input on our activities, including our communication and public relations activities, with a view to better servicing regional member Customs administrations. I would like to continue to convey not only ROCB A/P's activities but also members' interesting activities through our E-Newsletters.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Norikazu Kuramoto' in Japanese characters (倉本智和).

Norikazu Kuramoto (Mr.)

Head of the ROCB A/P

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Red Flag Indicators: for wildlife and timber trafficking in containerized sea cargo



Monica Zavagli (TRAFFIC)



Astrid Andersson (WWF Asia Pacific Counter-Illegal Wildlife Trade Hub)

Introduction

As part of the collaboration between ROCB A/P, WWF and TRAFFIC, we had an opportunity to contribute to this E-Newsletter. This article aims to introduce a compendium and guidance on “Red flag indicators for wildlife and timber trafficking in containerized sea cargo”. Customs administrations play a pivotal role in combatting illegal cross-border trafficking of wildlife. We hope this article will assist Customs administrations in preventing maritime wildlife trafficking.

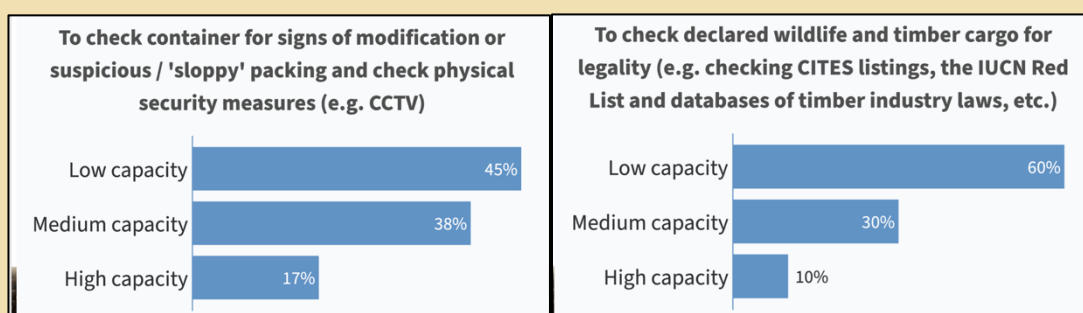
How to spot wildlife smuggling at sea

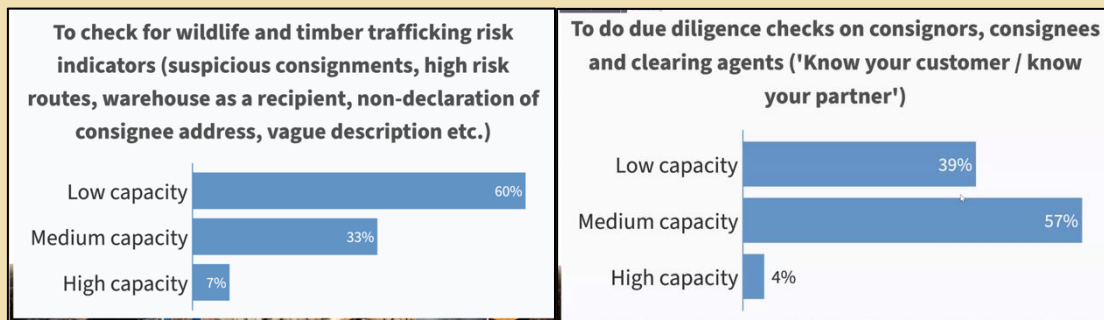
WWF and TRAFFIC develop guidelines of major “Red Flags” that indicate when trafficked wildlife might be hidden in shipping containers

Every year, protected wild animals and plants are trafficked globally – everything from

pangolin scales and elephant ivory to rhino horn and rosewood. Around 72–90% of it (by weight) is known to be smuggled by sea, making container cargo the preferred trafficking conduit by criminal syndicates due to ease of concealment and low chance of detection. Container risk profiling capacity is still very limited across many Customs jurisdictions in high-risk countries; less than 2% of the 800 million 20-foot TEUs shipped around the world every year can be efficiently physically inspected according to UNODC, making it a low-risk and high-reward crime avenue – one which is estimated to generate billions of USD for the organised criminal networks behind it. The ability to stop this scourge lies in the hands of all those stakeholders operating at the various stages of maritime supply chains; from customs officers and port authorities, to shipping lines and freight forwarders.

Unfortunately, the maritime sector is currently under-equipped to do so due to lack of awareness, training, technologies and supporting legislative frameworks. At a recent global [‘Shipping Roundtable’ event](#) representatives from 39 private shipping lines, freight forwarding companies and port operators, 18 public sector organisations, and seven policy-making bodies (including the WCO and the IMO) were asked to rank their ability to prevent maritime wildlife trafficking. Most ranked their capacity as ‘low’ or ‘middle’ level – with the majority indicating ‘low’ capacity on actions specifically focused on countering smuggling of wildlife.





In response to the needs for more knowledge and capacity to detect, intercept and report wildlife crime by maritime stakeholders, WWF and TRAFFIC lead the development of a compendium and guidance on [“Red flag indicators for wildlife and timber trafficking in containerized sea cargo”](#). The report equips frontliners in the shipping sector with information to enhance the detection of suspicious cargoes and possible non-compliance activities along the supply chain. It captures known red flags for illegal wildlife trade (IWT), with a focus on high-risk routes, coverloads and other smuggling methods used for species commonly found smuggled in containers; such as elephant ivory, pangolin scales and meat, protected timber, rhino horn, fish products such as shark fins, sea cucumbers, seahorses, and big cats parts.

CONTAINERIZED SEA CARGO AND WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

- Typically involving large volumes/weight of non-perishable wildlife products

The diagram illustrates the flow of wildlife products from their source to the trafficked state. The top row shows five live animals: a rainforest scene, an elephant, a pangolin, a shark, and a seahorse. The bottom row shows the corresponding trafficked products: timber, ivory, pangolin scales, shark fins, and sea cucumbers. Blue arrows point from each animal to its corresponding product, indicating the flow of trafficking.

TRAFFIC
The Wildlife Trade Monitoring Center

WWF

Some of these products are completely forbidden from international commercial trade (under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora CITES, or specific national bans); for others, that can be legally traded, the illegality comes from the lack of provision of proper and necessary permits that will demonstrate compliance with e.g. CITES regulations or established harvest quotas.

The Compendium also includes a dedicated section about CITES and examples of how its permit systems have been circumvented; and a set of recommendations and links to existing tools and best practices to help companies as well as government agencies to prevent further abuses from wildlife traffickers.

“The report gives us a good snapshot of the worldwide trends in wildlife and timber trafficking, traffic patterns, concealment methods and the species trafficked. We use the report to look at shipments fitting the pattern, and try to intercept wildlife trafficking reaching our borders.”

– Sunil Verma, Manager, Intelligence section, Environmental Enforcement Directorate, On assignment with Wildlife Enforcement Directorate (Intelligence) Environment Canada, Government of Canada.

“The compendium is excellent and provides a great deal of very useful information for shipping agents, freight forwarders and shipping companies to spot suspect containers and contraband,”

– Martin Cresswell, Technical Director, Hong Kong Shipowners Association

The following is a selection of some common indicators that could point to illicit wildlife trafficking in containerized shipping, with illustrative real-life case examples:



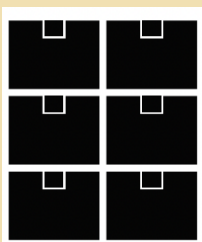
Shipment commodities incongruous with origin/destination

The commodities being shipped appear to be incompatible with a country's technical capabilities, natural resources, or origin. For example, semiconductor manufacturing equipment is unlikely to be shipped to a country with no electronics industry or timber shipped to a country that is already a major timber producer and exporter.

Between 2016 and 2017, Hong Kong Traders reported that their biggest sources for dried seahorses included Thailand, Philippines, mainland China, Australia, and India – however, most of these countries have banned seahorse exports, a report¹ later highlighted.

[BOX] Additional red flags

Also, look out for **abnormal shipping routes for the product and destination which makes no sense commercially** (e.g. shipping costs exceed the value of the commodity being shipped) or **geographically** (e.g. sent via a long slow route involving multiple stops). For example, low value consignments, such as scrap metal, being shipped across continents.



Consignment split across multiple shipments

This is a tactic used by traffickers to spread the risk of loss in case of interception by law enforcement. It's also used to benefit from smaller volumes that can more easily be hidden within shipments of legitimate commodities. The illegal shipment is spread across multiple containers

¹ Foster, S. J, et al. 2019. Global seahorse trade defies export bans under CITES action and national legislation. Marine Policy, Volume 103, May

under one booking or across multiple bookings.

Analysis of seizure data revealed that many larger shipments of illegal ivory out of Malaysian ports, appear to have been consolidated from multiple illegal consignments of ivory previously imported into Malaysia. In other cases, individual consignments of ivory seem to have been stored in Malaysia for a time and then later shipped in their entirety to an end destination, typically elsewhere in Southeast Asia or China.



Use of Free Trade Zones and Free Ports

The simplified import, export, transit and trans-shipment procedures and lax controls of free trade zones and free ports can mean they are prime sites for the diversion of illicit shipments and commodities to sanctioned countries.

Hong Kong is the largest trader for shark fin, accounting for more than 40 per cent of the global shark fin trade, with most of the shark fin imported into Hong Kong entering via the ocean route, as a result of its high-volume imports and duty-free status.

[BOX] Additional red flags

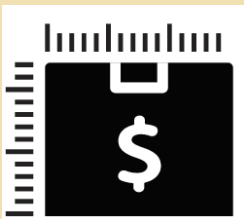
Also, look out for **changes in the shipping route once the ship has left port, last minute request for shipment clearance and cash payments.**



Weight and appearance discrepancy

The weight information stated in the packing list is illogical and/or anomalous. For example, actual weights that do not correspond to those provided in the Bill of Lading or seem grossly at odds with a reasonable weight for the declared commodity.

In 2018 Indian Customs seized nine tonnes of Red Sanders logs, a highly valuable variety of sandalwood, at Nhava Sheva seaport, which was being exported to Malaysia, in contravention of export prohibitions. The goods weighing over 18 tonnes had been declared as 648 cartons of “Polyester Yarn”. Rice bags were used to compensate, and increase the total weight of the declared cargo to avoid suspicion.



Value of cargo does not tally with description or size

The value of cargo can help triangulate evidence as to whether a proposed cargo to be loaded onto a vessel is stated in the Bills of Lading. It is not unusual that legal products that have low value or that benefit of reduced duty/taxation are used as a cover-up for illegal wildlife.

In 2015 Thai customs seized 3 tonnes of elephant ivory originated from Kenya; the cargo was declared as “tea leaves”, a commodity that benefits from reduced Customs checks.



Dubious or vague descriptions

Descriptions of commodities are vague or misleading. For example, commodities are described simply as ‘spare parts,’ ‘shells,’ ‘horn’ ‘machine tools’ or ‘electrical goods.’

In 2017 and 2018, shipments containing 6 tonnes and 8 tonnes of protected shark fins respectively, were seized in India; the cargo had been declared as “fish products”, “dried marine products” and “fish maw” to evade detection.



Questionable paperwork

Use of photocopies instead of original documents; inconsistencies such as a permit number or date which does not match; an invoice issued with “# 1”; expired documents; odd formatting or blurry text which may occur when documents are altered; evidence that documents have been tampered, but not officially countersigned; poor quality documents, for example with cut and pasted logos, spelling mistakes.

In 2018 Guatemala’s public prosecutor for environmental crimes ordered the return from China of four shipping containers marked as “rubber, recycling, and packing materials”. The team noticed certain anomalies with the paperwork, including that it had been signed by a known rosewood smuggler and that containers carrying the listed products were far heavier than they should have been.

[BOX] Additional red flags

Route information is found on the **Bill of Lading document**, which, if switched by a freight or shipping mid route should raise alarms as this procedure is often abused by traffickers to hide information about the true port of loading (origin), to reduce the likelihood that illegal shipments will be flagged for inspection.

Sometimes, a Letter of Indemnity (LoI) is used instead of a B/L. *A request to change LoI* to include different receivers, consignees and B/L could be used by wildlife criminals as a way to evade enforcement agencies by using different receivers at short notice.



Failure to disclose shipper or consignee information

Traffickers will try to conceal information about the true shipper, consignee, ownership and business activities related to the shipment in the B/L by providing incomplete or fraudulent shipping documentation. Due diligence should be applied to check if addresses appear to be fictitious, for example, incomplete or overly simplistic addresses (e.g., "1234 Main Street"); consignee names are similar to large well-known companies; the consignee address is incompatible with the businesses associated with the declared commodity; or a freight forwarding company is listed as the recipient for a shipment instead of the consignee.

Three containers containing over nine tons of illegal ivory arrived in Manila (Philippines) and Hai Phong (Viet Nam) ports in early 2009, were later found to be associated with a company called Puja Ltd and a P.O. box in Tanzania; investigations revealed the company was not registered either with Tanzania's Business Registration and Licensing Agency, or the Surface and Marine Transport Regulatory Authority, which are compulsory requirements.



First-time shippers and shipper's reluctance to offer information about their business and the end use of a product.

New customers should be subject to robust screening to confirm that they are what they claim to be, and are not shell companies created to obfuscate the ownership of cargo.

In 2018, Customs officers in Taiwan found 4,000 dead pangolins shipped from Malaysia to the port of Kaohsiung. The shipping company failed to return the container to its original address. The recipient did not submit a customs form and refused to accept the shipment, prompting the Customs office to inspect the container. Frozen sardines were stacked in the front section of the container concealing the pangolins at the back.

It is important to remember that red flag patterns associated to wildlife trafficking (and any other forms of illicit trade) are dynamic and evolve with time as traffickers adapt their modus operandi to avoid detection; thus, it's critical for all maritime stakeholders, including Customs, to keep updated on emerging trends.

AEO concept is key to the healthy development of Free Zones



Ms. Yuko Mamiya
Program Manager, ROCB A/P

1. Introduction

Free zones are expected by governments and policymakers to be key drivers for international trade and investment. Even amid the Pandemic, new free zones have been established in the world, attracted foreign investment, fostered the growth of local SMEs and stimulated employment. According to the World Investment Report 2020² issued by UNCTAD, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a rise in investment incentives in the health sector and at least 22 countries have established FZs³ targeting specifically the health industry or offering special benefits to companies in this sector. FZs dedicated to the health sector are mainly located in Asia, for example, Singapore has set up FZs to promote foreign direct investment (FDI) in health. In this way, many countries around the globe, including the AP region, encourage the establishment of FZs for further economic development by attracting FDI. However, FZs also attract illegal activities and have been exploited by criminal organizations. Such a fact could be the disincentive to invest in the FZs where are utilized for illicit activities.

In the light of this situation observed around the globe, the WCO and its Members have discussed how to ensure Customs involvement in FZs for their healthy development. One of the issues which have been discussed is to expand the concept of AEO to FZ stakeholders. Though the WCO

² <https://unctad.org/webflyer/world-investment-report-2020>

³ UNCTAD uses the term “Special Economic Zone (SEZ)”. However, in this article, the word “Free Zones (FZs)” is used as the standardized word.

encourages Members to utilize the AEO programme for ensuring safety and security in FZs, the WCO online survey revealed that Customs administrations that apply the AEO concept in FZs amount to less than half of the respondents. In this regard, the Secretariat Note concerning the AEO for FZ was issued as an information document. As stated in this Note, the Note does not represent the views of WCO Members and does not imply WCO decisions or actions, however, the Note provides useful tips on how to successfully apply the AEO concept to FZ operators and tenant companies.

This article explains the reason why the AEO concept could be one possible way to ensure the security of FZs and provides useful information to apply this concept, including the outline of the Secretariat Note.

2. Why is the AEO important in the context of FZs?

According to the WCO Research Paper No. 47⁴, the various papers pointed out that FZs are exploited for illicit activities including money laundering, tax evasion and trade in counterfeit goods or other illicit goods. Some also called for more Customs involvement in FZs to combat illegal activities perpetrated inside FZs. Furthermore, during the WCO Global Free Zone conference held in December 2020, the private sector provided the fact that Customs enforcement efforts in FZs resulted in large quantities of illicit trade seizures. They also emphasized the importance of the role played by Customs in fighting against illegal activities in FZs.

Then, how should Customs effectively manage increasing volumes of cargo in FZs? Through the WCO research paper, survey and conferences, it has been recognized that less or no Customs involvement in background checks on FZ operators, FZ applicant tenant companies, their key employees and compliance records could become a significant enabling factor for illicit trade related to FZs. With that in mind, the AEO could be one possible way to promote compliance of FZ operators and tenant companies, and thus prevent any possible illegal activities by granting tangible benefits to them.

In addition to that, as mentioned above, many countries encourage the establishment of FZs and the number of FZs is increasing more and more. On the other hand, limited resources and staffing are the challenges Customs are now facing. By increasing the number of trusted companies through the AEO programme, Customs can efficiently manage cargo in increasing FZs

⁴ http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/research/research-paper-series/47_free_zones_customs_involvement_omi_en.pdf?la=en

with limited resources.

Customs administrations have rich experience in verifying compliance levels and checking records of any infringements by using AEO validation criteria. This experience can be fully utilized for the healthy development of FZs.

3. Useful information to apply the AEO to FZ stakeholders

(1) WCO tools and instruments

The WCO developed the tools related to FZs such as “WCO Practical Guidance on Free Zones” and “WCO Secretariat Note – Expanding the Concept of AEO to Free Zone Stakeholders”. Both of them provide useful tips on how to apply the AEO concept to FZ stakeholders. Since the outline of the Practical Guidance was introduced in the E-Newsletter No. 71⁵, this time I would like to introduce the outline of the Secretariat Note.

This Note aims to provide information to help Customs in their efforts to apply the AEO concept to FZ stakeholders taking into consideration their roles, characteristics and business types.

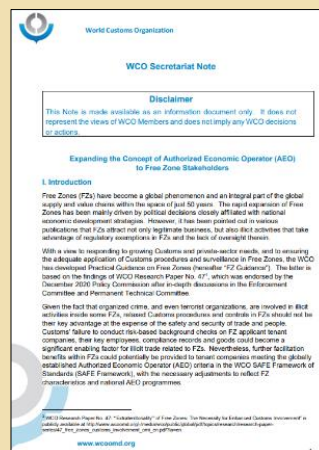
(a) Definition and main tasks of FZ operating body and tenant company

The Note explains the roles and business models of FZ operating companies and tenant companies as it is important to understand these basic concepts in order to consider how to apply the AEO concept to the FZ supply chain.

- FZ operating body

According to the WCO FZ Guidance, the “FZ operating body” is defined as a corporation, partnership, or person that operates a FZ under agreement and authorization by FZ Authorities. The main tasks of the FZ operating body could be similar to those of warehouse operators, terminal operators and port/airport operators in terms of the need to control the entrance, exit and storage of cargo in those areas.

For that reason, the Note pointed out that expanding the AEO concept to encompass FZ operating bodies would not be a challenge by utilizing Customs’ experience. However, the Note also mentioned that the peculiarity (variety of operations, longer or unlimited storage, etc.) and challenges (lack of Customs involvement, few Customs controls during the storage, etc.) of FZs should be considered when applying the AEO concept.



⁵ http://www.rocb-ap.org/file_media/file_image/file/ENL/ilovepdf_merged.pdf

FZ operating bodies conduct screening businesses and people wishing to operate in FZ. In this regard, the problem indicated in the WCO Research Paper No. 47 is that some operating bodies do not get relevant agencies such as Customs involved in this company approval process. therefore, applying the AEO programme to FZ operators could be an efficient way to ensure the compliance of all tenant companies.

- FZ tenant company

“FZ tenant company” means a company operating inside a FZ. Such operations include trading, processing (grading, repacking, labeling, distribution, manufacturing, etc.), logistics and other services related to trade/logistics.

The Note indicated that extending the concept to FZ tenant companies is not a new initiative since many Customs administrations already apply the AEO concept to importers, exporters and distributors.

As mentioned above, a lack of due diligence and compliance record checks during the process of approving the tenant companies might lead to illegal activities in FZs. Therefore, Customs should consider expanding the AEO concept to tenant companies based on necessary cooperation with FZ Authorities and FZ operating bodies so that Customs can conduct risk-based background checks to prohibit legal or national persons convicted of illegal activities from operating within FZs and take appropriate measures such as revoking permits.

(b) Conditions and criteria for AEOs

The Note identifies the additional FZ criteria based on the criteria provided by the Annex IV of the SAFE Framework of Standards as well as suggestions taken from FZ Guidance. The main points are as follows:

- Having an IT system managing and storing commercial records, which is interfaced with Customs IT system
- Having Customs be involved in reviewing applications by tenant companies as well as the permission procedure for activities related to Customs procedures and controls in FZs
- Establishment of mechanisms for education and training
- Acceptance of Customs ex-officio onsite checks
- Following Customs basic construction standards and other standards for Customs control.

(c) Benefits for FZ AEOs

In order to give FZ operators and tenant companies an incentive to improve the compliance and cooperate with Customs, tangible, meaningful, transparent and measurable benefits should be given to them.

The Note identifies some possible operator-specific benefits for FZ operating bodies and FZ tenant companies. In addition to these benefits, AEO certified companies could benefit from additional trade facilitation through Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) with partner countries when exporting their cargoes from FZs.

As Operator-specific benefits for FZ operating bodies, the Note has listed a faster approval of new FZ and new tenant companies, waiver of past record verification, solvency certification, or the like.

As Operator-specific benefits for FZ tenant companies, the Note has listed deferred payment of duties, taxes, fees and charges, faster processing of refunds and adjudications, pre-arrival clearance, or the like.

(d) Conclusion

The Note concluded by underlining the importance of expanding the AEO concept to the entire FZ supply chain in order to ensure the safety and security of the whole supply chain. The AEO programme could be one possible way to efficiently manage cargoes and companies inside FZs with Customs' limited resources.

(2) The Code of Conduct set out in the OECD Guidance

The OECD developed the "Guidance to Counter Illicit Trade: enhancing transparency in Free Trade Zones". Given that Customs administrations play a vital role in the healthy development of FZs, the OECD encourages its Members and non-Members to give Customs the various authorities such as inspecting goods, prohibiting incompliant persons from carrying out an activity in FZs and requiring necessary data related to the movement of goods.

This Guidance includes the "Code of Conduct for Clean Free Trade Zones"⁶ and encourages FZs to comply with this. This Code of Conduct would also be useful when considering the specific conditions and criteria for AEOs for FZs.

4. Way forward

Needs for Customs active involvement in FZs have been recognized through the various publications written by international organizations and business organizations. In response to these needs, the WCO has provided various tools and instruments and conducted regional workshops. Moreover, the first Global pre-Accreditation Workshop for experts on FZs was

⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/risk/oecd-draft-guidance-to-counter-illicit-trade-enhancing-transparency-in-free-trade-zones-annex-2018.pdf>

convened this May to establish a pool of Technical and Operational Advisors on FZs. Fully accredited experts are expected to contribute to future WCO capacity building activities. In close cooperation with these experts, the WCO will hold the Regional and Sub-Regional Workshops on FZs in this FY as part of capacity building activities for Members.

ROCB A/P has been committed to conducting capacity building activities including activities related to FZs. We continue to support the WCO and the AP Members in securing and facilitating the trade through FZs by assisting in conducting the WCO workshops and promoting the WCO tools and instruments related to FZs among the AP Members.

Reviewing online workshops by ROCB A/P



Ms. Grace Ye

Program manager, ROCB A/P

Introduction

The last fiscal year was a tough and challenging year for ROCB A/P, because started the new delivery methodology of workshops, being online. This new meeting process has now become the 'new normal' under the current circumstances. We found that there is benefit and challenges in delivering workshops online. In my essay, I would like to review the online workshops organized by ROCB A/P in last WCO fiscal year.

ROCB A/P's Efforts

In order to promote technical cooperation at regional level, ROCB A/P made all possible efforts to offer capacity building opportunities to its Members. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, ROCB A/P has been dedicated to providing Members in AP region with Customs Capacity Building activities via virtual workshops. The necessary digital platforms and equipment (cameras, microphones, and screens) were made available and ROCB A/P staff were trained to manage operating systems.



During last fiscal year, we hosted eight Regional workshops and four Sub-regional workshops. As with most training methods, online workshops also have its own set of positives and negatives. Decoding and understanding these positives and negatives will help us create strategies for a more efficient delivery methodology whilst ensuring high-quality workshops are provided for our Members.

Advantages of online workshop

Based on our experience, without doubt, online workshops have some advantages compared with traditional face-to-face workshops.

1. Affordability

Due to the online arrangement, international travel were not required. Experts and participants did not need to book air tickets and hotels. Additionally, the venues were no longer needed. In this case, costs were saved.

Reviewing online WS by ROCB AP	
Merit	Advantage
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ No travel required<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Air tickets■ Hotel■ Visa■ No necessary physical classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Easy to access from individual PC■ Participate from anywhere■ Larger number of participants can join■ Observer can be invited

2. Accessibility

Another advantage of online workshop is that it allowed participants to join workshops from any location of their choice. It also enabled us to reach out to a more extensive network of customs officials, experts and observers. Furthermore, virtual workshops could be recorded and shared for future reference. This allowed participants to access the presentations and other materials at a time of their choosing.

Disadvantage of online workshops

However, at the same time we are facing a lot of difficulties and challenges resulted from virtual workshops.

1. Time zone difference

As you know, Asia Pacific region covers a wide range of area and Members, and time difference among Members is very large, nearly 9 hours end to end, so finding a common working time is pretty tough.

Therefore, the workshop was held for less than 3 hours per day. In addition, since the time

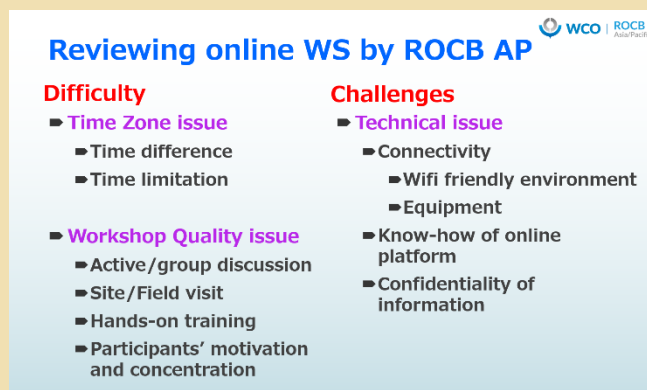
big difference with WCO Brussels, it always put a heavy burden on WCO experts for mobilizing normally in very early morning in Brussels. Considering these burdens, the workshop was basically set to 3 days or less, and total working hours of workshop were less than half compared with previous face-to-face workshops.

2. Workshop quality

Lack of interaction is also one of the disadvantages, which directly impacted the quality of workshops. Lively and actively group discussions, site visits, and hands on training, which are the major benefits of face-to-face workshops could not be arranged for the virtual workshops. Needless to say, it was difficult to build relationships and networking without face-to-face interaction.

3. Inability to stay focused

Another disadvantage of virtual workshops is the struggle with focusing on the screen for long periods of time. Therefore, it is imperative for the presenters to interact with participants and help them to stay focused.



4. Technical issues

The quality of online workshops also relies on the quality of the internet connection as of today, which is an essential foundation for ensuring high- quality workshops. During the workshops in this fiscal year, workshops were interrupted due to unstable internet connection. Unfortunately, there are still unstable factors at this stage.

In addition, the organizing side, the providing side, and the participating side need some essential digital equipment and know-how related to online workshops. Of course, there is also the issue of information security due to the difficulty of control overall connecting participants.

Evaluation by ROCB A/P

First, although there were many issues and difficulties mentioned above by online WS, it is highly evaluated that we were able to provide some WS to AP members. These are not only the efforts of WCO and ROCB AP as provider sides, but also the efforts of the participants. The reason is that many participants were also forced to respond in a time difference, and participants are required to maintain equipment and concentrate to WS.

Secondly, I think that the Internet environment issues, technical issues and know-how might be resolved over time. In addition, based on the fact that a certain amount of information sharing could be carried out by online WS in last fiscal year, it could be expected that a certain number of online WS will be continued in the future from the aspect of cost performance advantage. Therefore, continuous efforts by the providers and participants both must to be required continually.

Thirdly, although site visits and hands-on training are not possible by online WS, we confirmed that there are many themes which need site visits and hands-on training. In addition, active discussions are more effective when conducted face-to-face than online, and from the perspective networking, it was found that the requests of members are high for face to face learning.

Way forward

ROCB A/P would like to keep in mind such lessons learnt from online workshops undertaken this fiscal year including all feedback and our self-evaluation to fully reflect to our activity.. At the same time, we are now preparing to resume the face-to-face workshops. ROCB A/P is now researching the possibility of the coexistence of online and face-to-face workshops in the near future.

Introduction and elaboration of AEO Mutual Recognition Arrangement/ Agreement



Ms. Sherman YU

Program Manager for the South East Asia of ROCB A/P

Introduction

Readers of this essay may have heard of “AEO MRA”. This is the next step in pursuing further benefits of the AEO internationally. Needless to say, establishing an AEO system in your own country is the first step, and it is essential that it is properly and reliably operated. With this basic condition fulfilled, the possibility of MRA can be realised. Although AEO itself is a domestic system, MRA is an international cooperation framework, so that mutual trust and cooperation with counter members are indispensable. And when proceeding with an MRA, mutual understanding of the process up to the conclusion is required. In my essay, I would like to briefly introduce the WCO documentation that will be helpful in forwarding an MRA.



What is Mutual Recognition Arrangement/ Agreement (MRA) ?

Mutual Recognition Arrangement / Agreement (MRA) refers to an agreement or arrangement signed by two customs administrations which mutually recognize the Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) that has been properly granted by the signatory administrations. MRA provides a framework to extend AEO benefits (e.g. reduced cargo examination, prioritized customs clearance) across borders in the jurisdiction of the partner customs administrations.



The relationship of AEO Programme and MRA under SAFE Framework

As aforementioned, the AEO programme itself is an important element that contributes to the implementation of an MRA. An AEO programme is the subject matter that ‘how’ and ‘what’ to be mutually recognized by respective customs administrations so as to provide facilitation in trade and uphold the supply chain security. An AEO programme strengthens the facilitation and security **within** a country or administration whereas MRA, through the binding effect under the agreement itself, **extends the context to regional or global level**.



Tools and handbook of MRA from WCO - AEO Mutual Recognition Strategy Guide

In 2021, WCO published a *AEO Mutual Recognition Strategy Guide* (hereafter refers as the *Guide*) to provide a comprehensive and practical guidance to the members about the MRA issues. The *Guide* elaborated the important elements and prerequisites of MRA that a customs administration needed to consider. To facilitate the members to prepare better, the *Guide* provide templates, process flow and case study (‘good practice’) a reference.



The following content will summarize the *Guide* and highlight some points for readers’ easy reference:

I) Elements/ Prerequisites

One of the determining factors is ‘readiness’ of both signatory administrations i.e. both side are ‘qualified’ to sign and implement a MRA. Readiness can be interpreted in several aspects:

- Compliance and commitment to SAFE FoS
- Resources allocation and availability for the entire process of preparing, negotiating and enforcing MRA
- Existence of fully operational AEO programme
- Benefits granted the MRA (‘Reciprocity’)
- IT Technology (Efficiency and effectiveness in recognizing AEO status)

II) Preparation

Even if the AEO programme and the MRA are stemmed from the SAFE FoS but due to differences in social, cultural, economic and legal background in respective customs administrations, the signatory parties have to consider the following and see whether they are 'compatible' so that they can proceed to next step of developing the MRA:

- Political will and support from senior management
- Coordination and transparency (Sharing of data and information related to AEO)
- Training and publicity (to understand the mechanism and operation of each other's AEO programme; to train up competent AEO validator/ auditor to examine the compatibility of programmes)
- Enforceability and monitoring of MRA after implementation

III) Negotiation

Negotiation is referred the process of discussing what to be included in the MRA text (agreement) and agreed upon. The *Guides* suggested the below areas should be covered so that the context of MRA will be clearly defined and thus makes it enforceable and operable:

- Parameter of scope of the negotiation
- Identification of roles
- Timeframes
- Draft legal text
- Evaluation mechanism
- Communication plan

IV) Site validation & Observation

The signatory parties will sent AEO validators or auditors to understand and observe how the AEO programme of their counterparts operate in real time and on site. This process can also be named as 'Joint validation' as it is expected that both parties will participate together in monitoring or validating the AEO companies. Views and experience can be exchanged so as to improve both AEO programmes in practice.

V) Implementation

After the rounds of negotiation and validation were conducted, MRA can be concluded. Both parties can choose to adopt a 'trial run' to test whether the systems (e.g. IT system, customs clearance systems) as well as the staff themselves are ready to implement and enforce the MRA to

path way for full implementation. However, in some cases, customs administrations will go straight to the actual implementation stage.

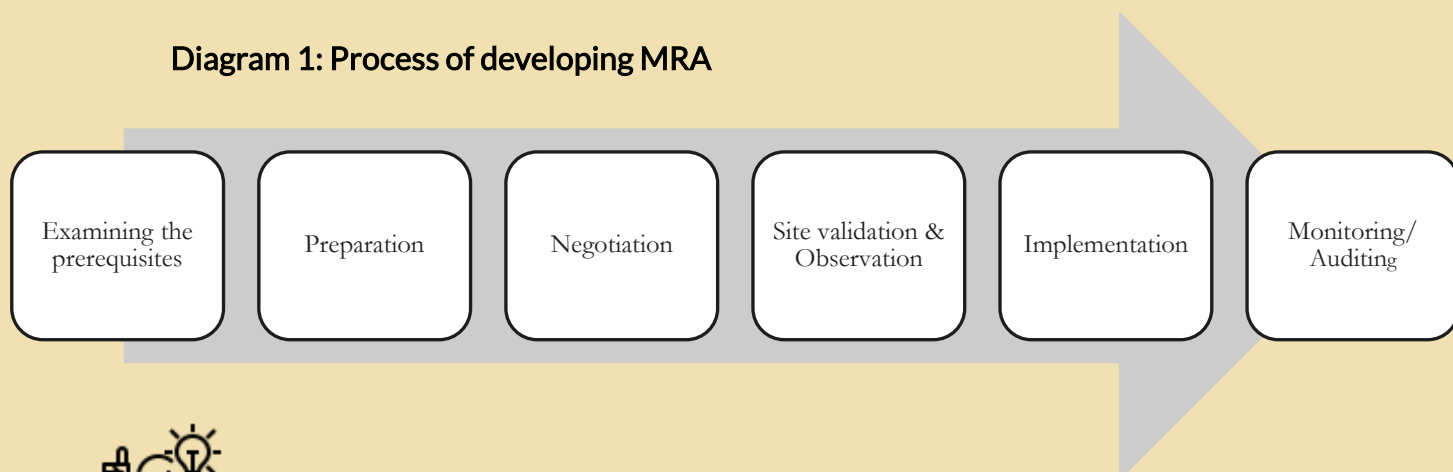
The major benchmark of successful implementation of MRA is whether unique AEO identifier is assigned and therefore the company concerned can be recognized reciprocally. If successful, the benefits e.g. less examination in cargo or prioritized clearance should be given to the AEO.

VI) Monitoring and Auditing

Once an MRA is fully implemented, customs administrations should conduct regular review and monitoring to see if any discrepancies have arisen. On one hand, this is to keep checking any unforeseeable circumstances that will affect the effectiveness of MRA and on the other hand, constant monitoring or auditing can keep both parties to be updated on the latest development in supply chain security.

Upon bilateral agreement, some customs administrations will set up regular meeting and data exchange mechanism to ensure MRA as well as the benefit conferred are properly managed.

Diagram 1: Process of developing MRA



Lessons learned

The concept of AEO and MRA is not statistical. Both are to keep evolving and adapting to the ever-changing global Customs landscape. The *Guide* summarized several observations and proposed recommendations to members to consider:

- Adequate consultation with stakeholders
- Resource allocation for developing and maintaining the operation of MRA
- Automation/ IT systems (the ideal state is using the same protocol and standard; otherwise have to develop solutions or conversions that make both IT system ‘communicable’ and ‘interoperable’)



Way forward

I) Disseminated the Good Practice of MRA implementation

Sharing of good practice of countries that have more experience in MRA negotiation and implementation can help those are less experienced to improve. The WCO will continue to regularly publish guidelines and tools to members. Nevertheless, we believe the collective experience of the 'developed' members can provide examples, shared their lessons learned and their perspectives with other 'inexperienced' members on MRA issues.

II) Study on synchronization in different customs administrations

One of the major challenges that faced by customs administrations during the MRA negotiation is both parties are not on the same level playing field. That said, their level of development, be it in terms of the AEO programme itself or the IT system that back up the customs clearance procedure have a huge gap therein. Therefore, it would be advisable for those customs administrations who showed intention to come into MRA agreement that both side need to identify the difference and try to narrow the gap or work out alternatives to solve the problem of 'synchronization'.

In the long run, automation and advancement in IT technology are the way forward so that systems can exchange information and data in a seamless manner.

III) Capacity building activities in MRA issue

Apart from using technology to increase the effectiveness and efficiency, we are convinced that human resource is the most important asset that makes an MRA a success. Professional and competent staff are of vital importance as they will participate the entire process starting from preparation, negotiation, validation and implementation of MRA. What's important is not only those worked for MRA issues, the content and operation of MRA has to duly inform the frontline officers so that they will know how to put the MRA content into practice and grant facilitation to the AEO involved.

Therefore, a comprehensive training curriculum and skill sets have to be tailor made for the MRA topic.

ROCB A/P will continue to support the work of WCO and acting as a bridge between the AP members and WCO. We will promote the tools, conventions, instruments and hot topics of WCO to the members.

Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs Community



Ms. Pavida Boonmun
Assistant Program Manager, ROCB A/P

Introduction

In the past, there were stereotypical gender roles globally. Nowadays, our world is changing. All genders are welcome to work in various positions, this is reflected in the work place and also in balancing work to keep a household running. Even being single is also accepted, as every gender has the right to manage their own lives.

Gender Stereotyping means *“A generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men.”*

“Gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women’s and men’s capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and/ or make choices about their lives.”

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

However, gender inequality still exists as a serious topic that many societies have to deal with. Opportunity in employment, education, healthcare etc. are not equal in some communities because stereotypical gender roles still exist in some working environments, such as in promotion and selection for positions such as executives or secretaries.

Moreover, in recent decades, societies have had increased exposure to ‘LGBTQ+’, this is another reason why we understand the importance of “Gender equality and Diversity” to help be inclusive of all.

As a woman working in Customs, it would be wonderful if all women, not just me, were given equal opportunities. I am fully aware that Customs administrations in the world are working on this matter under the WCO initiatives. In my essay, I would like to highlight the points of WCO's efforts on Gender Equality and Diversity from my point of view with my hope is that diversity will bring further benefits to Customs around the world

What is Gender Equality?

Gender Equality is based on the concept that all genders of human beings have equal rights to develop themselves and make their own decisions including equal opportunities to enhance their abilities and interests without limitation of common stereotypes of gender.

From 1948, Gender Equality and Diversity are fundamental rights outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Moreover, objective No.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN), gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. It highlights access for everyone to education, health care, and better quality of life. To emphasize its importance, 'Gender Equality' is also listed as a priority of the UN's International Development Agenda for 2030.

Why Does Gender Equality Matter?

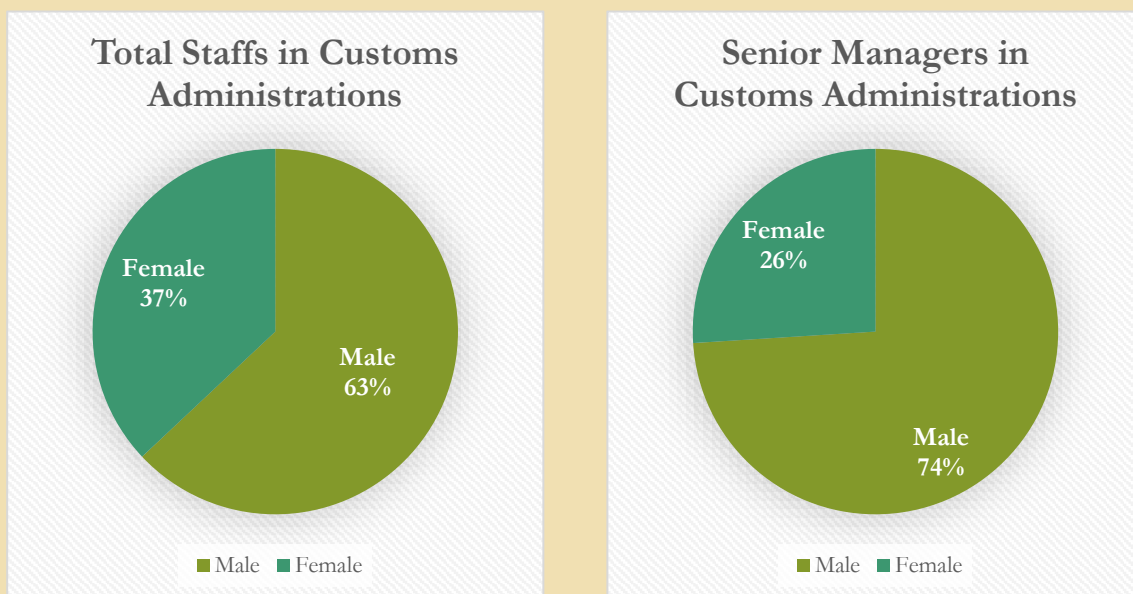
Over the last decades, stereotypical gender roles always lead to gender inequality which affects everyone in every society in various aspects. Unequal treatment of a person, based on their gender, limits their access to opportunities in education, health care and employment etc. As a result, those limitations will eventually affect the social and economic development of their own countries.

On the other hand, equal access to education and other opportunities will bring a better quality of life to citizens, higher economic growth and sustainable development. The equality directly impacts not only economic growth, but also strengthens national and international law, and human rights.

Organizations or societies with diversity of gender and balanced representation from different backgrounds bring different perspectives which ultimately leads to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Ending the stereotypical gender roles in communities will finally bring freedom and opportunities to all genders which also leads to balance in work and personal life.

The WCO Annual Report 2020-21 shows the current situation of Gender Equality and Diversity in the Customs community as below. Personally, I believe these numbers have improved

in recent years by efforts of Members, however we must keep going as there is still room for improvement in both total number of staff and in balanced representation at management levels.



Source: [annual-report-2020_2021.pdf \(wcoomd.org\)](https://www.wcoomd.org/publications/annual-report-2020-2021.pdf)

Needless to say, to develop organizational efficiency and effectiveness, Gender Equality and Diversity is listed as an important issue by the WCO. It also provides improved safety for traders and employers with an improved ability to relate to a wider range of customers. It is also expected that gender balance in the workplace will lessen instances of sexual harassment or other inappropriate behaviors. As a result, it is highlighted as an important agenda to modernize Customs Administrations and to ensure transparency including integrity.

WCO Initiatives on Gender Equality

As Customs administrations have responsibilities to protect society, it is necessary to raise a gender equality agenda to reflect and respond to entire society including its diversity and balance of gender. It is about changing the way of thinking to have more holistic perspective for the reform and modernization agenda.

Since 2013, The WCO has promoted Gender Equality and Diversity in the Customs community supporting members to implement international standards and modernization. The WCO considers Gender Equality and Diversity as one of the priorities in its capacity building agenda as it is proved that development programs and capacity building activities can improve overall outcomes and ensure sustainability of activities. As a result, initiatives were launched by WCO to support the agenda as follows;

- Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT)
- WCO Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity

- Blended training package “Advancing Gender Equality in Customs”
- Module addressing Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programs and People Development Diagnostic tool
- Compendium of Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs

Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT)

The WCO developed the Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT) to measure the extent of Gender Equality and to make improvements, as an outcome of the international conference “Women in Customs, Trade and Leadership”. At this conference 160 participants gathered from 50 countries to highlight challenges faced by women traders and the need to engage women’s organizations in discussions on international trade.

The GEOAT is composed of indicators that help Administrations with ideas on how to advance gender equality and to achieve sustainable change in its internal as well as external policies by monitoring progress.

The tool aims to assist Customs Administrations in assessing their policies, practices and activities to see where to further address gender equality issues as an integrated part of their reform and modernization agenda. In 2019, it was updated and new chapters were added including definitions of gender equality and diversity related concepts, a chapter on how to implement gender mainstreaming through project management and new cross-cutting indicators necessary for the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

WCO Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity

The WCO has launched the WCO Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity to provide a platform for Members to exchange experience and good practice including raising awareness of the GEOAT.

The group is composed of assigned representatives from Members, and the working group meeting is held approximately every 2 months through the CliKC! Platform where reports and good practices are also shared with Members.

Blended training package “Advancing Gender Equality in Customs”

In 2018, the WCO also developed a blended training package “Advancing Gender Equality in Customs”. This training package, funded by the Government of Finland through the East and Southern Africa Capacity Building Programs II, is composed of two tracks;

- A one-week workshop targeting middle and senior Customs managers focusing on

how to implement gender equality in Customs and its links to customs reform and modernization.

- An e-learning module accessible in English and French in the CLiKC! Platform aimed at raising general awareness on gender equality, targeting all Customs officers.

Module addressing Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programs and People Development Diagnostic tool

The Secretariat has also incorporated a module addressing Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in its Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programs and in its People Development Diagnostic tool, as the WCO always looks forward to further promoting Gender equality and Diversity in its activities and invites its members keep the Secretariat informed of any initiatives taken.

Compendium of Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs

This first edition of the Compendium of Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs was issued in 2020 to updates and encourage Members to share more practices and lessons learned on advancing gender equality and diversity. Implementing gender responsive and inclusive measures is often linked to the national legislative frameworks which can also be the result of proactive initiatives from the Customs administrations to drive this agenda forward.

The latest Compendium consists of 17 practices from 17 countries to illustrate several of the key GEOAT principles and indicators. It helps to concrete initiatives to address particular issues such as promoting work life balance, inclusiveness in organizations, women in leadership positions or preventing sexual harassment and violence.

Moreover, to emphasize its importance, two surveys on gender equality and diversity in Customs have been disseminated by the WCO, in 2016 and 2019 respectively, to gather data and related information on the gender balance within Customs Administrations and to get a better understanding on how advanced Members are in this area. The WCO received around 60 replies to the first survey (2016) and 95 replies to the second survey (2019).

ROCB A/P Efforts to Gender Equality in Customs Administrations

The WCO Asia/Pacific Regional Strategic Plan (RSP) 2020-2022 is a platform provided for A/P Member Administrations to identify critical areas that require special attention. Referred to

one of its objectives on Focus Area 3 (Capacity Building) which is 'to enhance effective resource deployment', specific actions on women empowerment and encouraging women in working are planned to encourage Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs Administrations.

ROCB A/P Mission* is “To work together to continuously promote secure and facilitated trade, ensure compliance with and enforcement of customs laws, strengthen customs capability and modernization.”

Together with the ROCB A/P efforts, those specific actions in the RSP are supported to promote full and effective participation of women in international training and other capacity building activities organized by the ROCB A/P. Also, ROCB A/P always encourage Members to increase the representation of women at senior levels and international forums because, with diversity in the region, it is necessary to demonstrate collaboration in modernizing Customs procedures.

Capacity building activities can enhance overall improvements and ensure sustainability of activities, ROCB A/P has a dedicated effort, and commits to assisting our Members in Customs-related issues including raising awareness of Gender Equality and Diversity among Members through our activities as we committed in our Mission*.

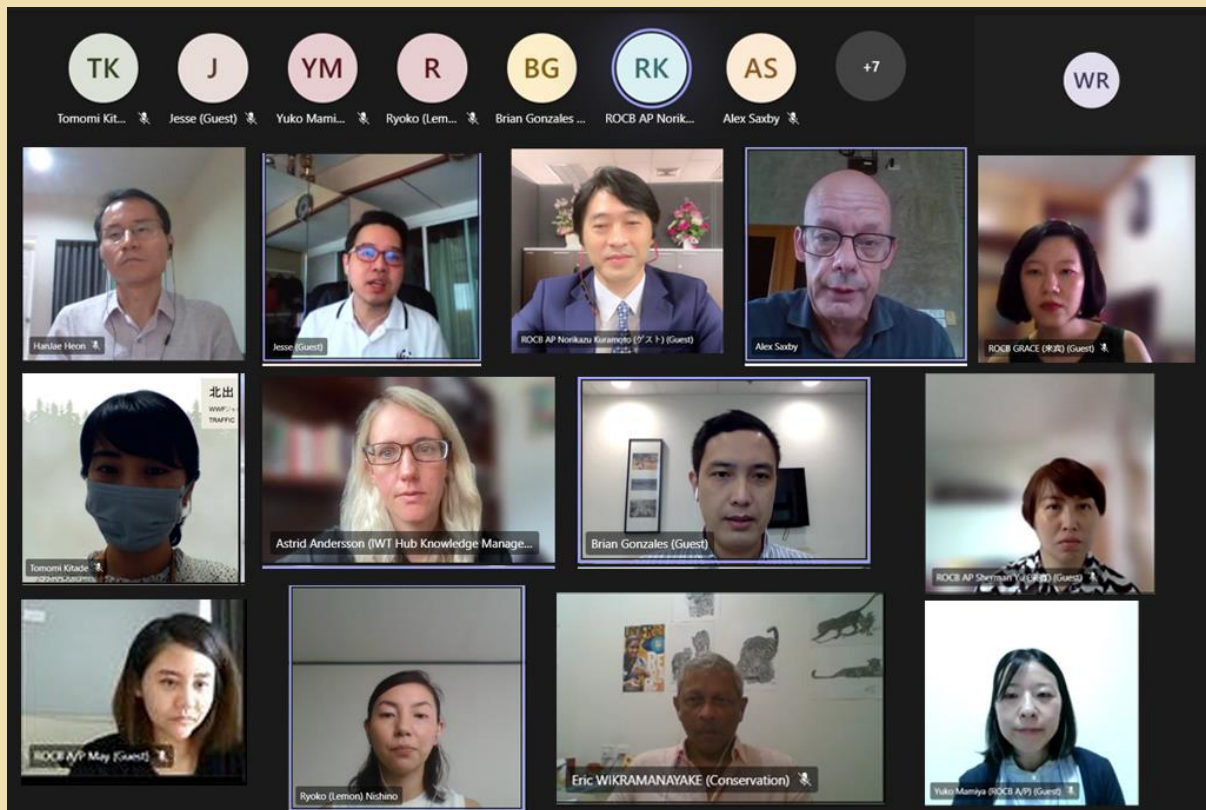
Way Forward

During the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, ROCB A/P still pay attention to Members' needs and focus on strengthening capacities in Customs-related issues including the importance of Gender Equality and Diversity. We highly appreciate the support of AP Members in considering Gender Equality in promoting international opportunities, especially capacity building workshops.

Together with raising awareness on importance of Gender Equality and Diversity in the Customs community under the WCO initiatives, it is hoped that the Members' constant efforts on this matter will maximize the potential of diversity towards a more modern, open and attractive Customs.

Workshops and Meetings

The ROCB A/P discussed future collaboration with World Wild Fund for Nature
6 August 2021, Online Meeting hosted by ROCB A/P



On 6 August 2021, Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto, Head of ROCB A/P, and Program Managers of ROCB A/P met online with the representatives of regional offices of the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) to discuss future collaboration with them.

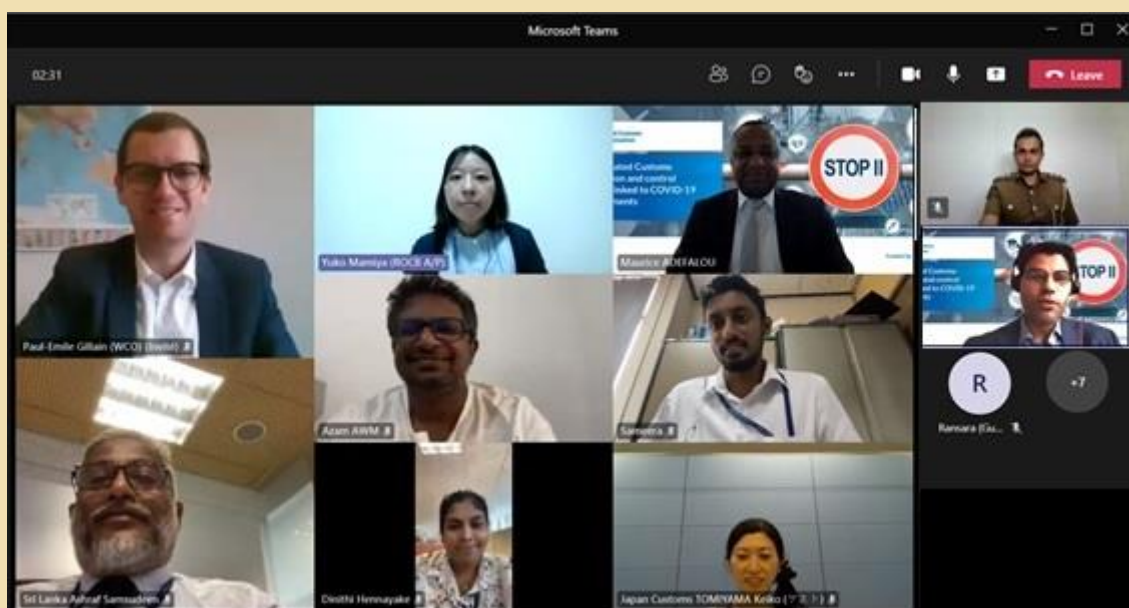
Mr. Kuramoto briefly introduced the outline of the WCO and ROCB A/P. He also underlined that the ROCB A/P has endeavored to further enhance cooperation with development partners and is always more than happy to discuss future collaboration.

Mr. Brian V. Gonzales, Head of Protection of Endangered Species, WWF-Hong Kong, explained WWF activities including developing the guidelines to detect and seizure Illegal Wildlife Trafficking, holding the various events and strengthening cooperation with Customs administrations. He also introduced a Compendium and guidance for the maritime shipping sector which aims to capture the most common red flags indicators for illegal wildlife trade (IWT) happening through containerized sea cargo.

During the meeting, future opportunities for collaboration and next steps were actively discussed. The ROCB A/P and regional offices of WWF have agreed on continuously strengthening ROCB A/P – WWF cooperation in assisting AP Members in building their capacity to combat IWT. For more information about the compendium for the maritime shipping sector at <https://apps5.wwf.org.hk/red-flag-compendium/>

The WCO National Workshop on combating counterfeiting and piracy for Sri Lanka Customs Administration

4-6 August 2021, Online Workshop hosted by WCO



The WCO National Workshop on combating counterfeiting and piracy for Sri Lanka Customs Administration was held on 4 to 6 August 2021. The Workshop was organized by the WCO under the sponsorship of the Japan Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF/Japan). 24 officers from Sri Lanka Customs administrations attended the Workshop. The expert on IPR from Japan Customs and Ms. Yuko Mamiya, Program Manager of the ROCB A/P, also attended the Workshop to support the facilitation of the Workshop.

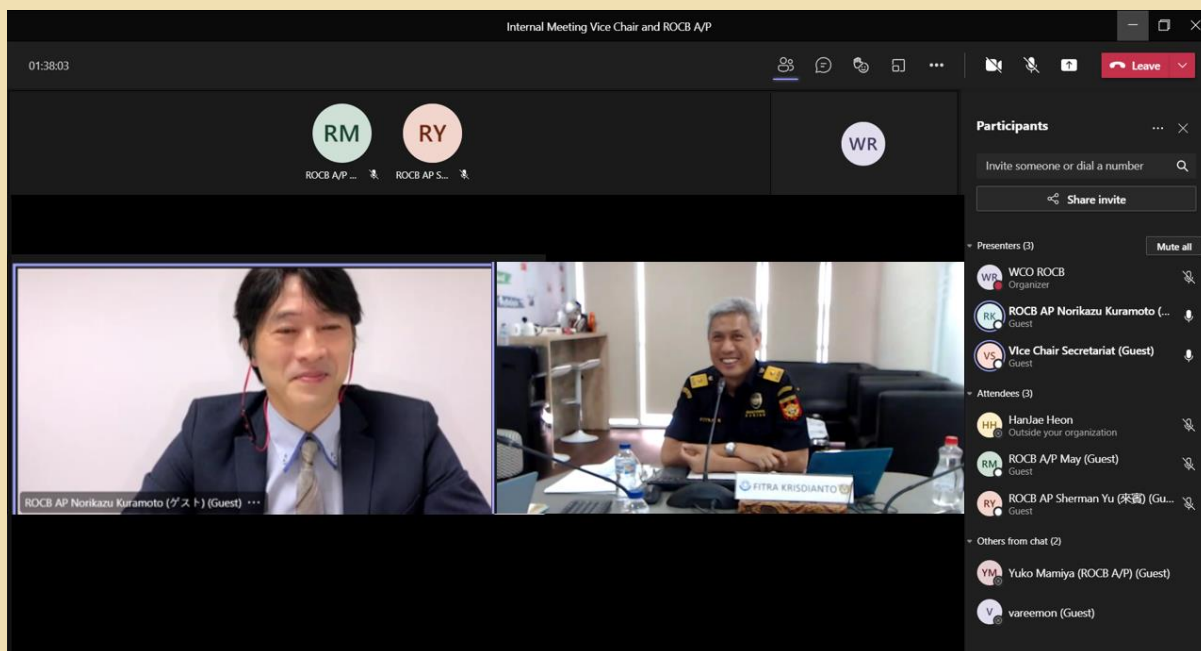
During the Workshop, the participants actively discussed effective enforcement strategies to prevent counterfeit products from entering the national territory. In the light of global pandemic, discussions centered on combating illegal trafficking of medicines and medical supplies linked with the COVID-19. The WCO introduced its tools and instruments which help Members to effectively fight against counterfeit products at border. The expert from Japan Customs shared their experience in IPR border enforcement focusing on utilizing risk management.

Representatives of Right holders including pharmaceutical companies attended the workshop and shared important information such as a way to distinguish genuine products from counterfeit ones, supply chains of genuine vaccines and counterfeit products indicators.

The active participation and contribution of the participants resulted in a successful workshop and this workshop supported enriching participants' knowledge as well as enhancing communication between Customs Administration and Right holders. The participants expressed their appreciation to CCF/Japan, the WCO, the expert from Japan Customs and the ROCB A/P.

ROCB A/P and A/P Vice-Chair confirm its close cooperation in this FY

23 Aug 2021 online



Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto, Head of the ROCB A/P, organized a meeting with WCO Asia Pacific Vice Chair (VC) Secretariat to discuss key events in AP region as well as to exchange of views about capacities building activities in this financial year. Mr Ilkwon HAN & Ms Sherman YU, Program Managers, and Ms Pavida BOONMUN, Assistant Program Manager also joined the meeting.

Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto kick-started the meeting by presenting the latest update in ROCB A/P, capacities building works and the work plan in this financial year. Mr Fitra Krisdianto, Chief of Operational of WCO AP VC Secretariat welcomed the ideas proposed by ROCB A/P and shared upcoming events organized by VC. Both parties exchanged views in the hot topics and shared experience in encouraging active participation from the participants in the key events in AP region.

In addition to that, both sides agreed should work hand in hand in organizing capabilities building activities as well as high-level meetings in this fiscal year.

The ROCB A/P discussed future collaboration with RILO AP

25 August 2021, Online Meeting hosted by ROCB A/P



On 25 August 2021, Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto, Head of ROCB A/P, and the staff of ROCB A/P met online with Mr. Tae-Soo YOO, Head of RILO A/P and his colleagues to discuss future collaboration as the WCO regional body in AP region, moderated by Mr. Ilkwon HAN, program manager of ROCB AP.

Mr. Kuramoto briefly introduced the outline of ROCB A/P and key events organized by ROCB AP including workshops in this fiscal year. He also underlined that the ROCB A/P has successfully completed the capacity building workshops at the last fiscal year by great support from RILO AP.

Mr. Tae-Soo YOO, Head of RILO AP highlighted the importance of cooperation against the threat of illicit trade at his opening remarks. And then Mr. YoungKyoung KIM, Deputy head of RILO AP explained the activities of RILO AP including current joint enforcement projects, such as Operation GOALS, MEKONG DRAGON, DEMETER.

During the meeting, future opportunities for collaboration and next steps were actively discussed. The ROCB A/P and RILO AP have agreed on continuously strengthening ROCB A/P – RILO AP cooperation in assisting the capacity building programs for AP Members.

Customs Administrations in the Pacific Islands have been committed to supporting the Master Trainer Programme

6 September 2021, Online Workshop hosted by ROCB A/P



The WCO/JICA Joint Sub-Regional Launching Ceremony for Master Trainer Programme (MTP) for the Pacific Islands was held online on 6 September 2021. The Ceremony was organized by the WCO, JICA and ROCB A/P. The six Customs administrations in the Pacific region, namely Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu as well as the representatives from Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) Secretariat and Japan Customs attended the Ceremony. Mr. Noriakazu Kuramoto, Head, Ms. Yuko Mamiya, Program Manager, Ms. Jate-arpa Benjaphong, Program Coordinator, and Ms. Vareemon Chairungsilert, Program Coordinator of the ROCB A/P, also attended as facilitators/coordinators for the Ceremony.

The MTP is a unique programme that takes a holistic approach to achieve the objective by combining activities relating to “Training of Trainers” and activities relating to the “development of materials/programme” to be utilized by Trainers taking into account the unique needs of Customs Administrations. In the wake of the tangible success of phase 1 of MTP which resulted in the pool of Master Trainers in the East African region, the WCO and JICA agreed to offer the MTP on Harmonized System classification and Customs Valuation for six WCO Members in the Pacific Islands as part of the WCO Small Island Economies initiative.

This online high-level launching ceremony was kicked off with opening remarks by Dr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General of WCO, Mr. Toshiyuki Nakamura, Senior Vice President of

JICA, and Mr. Wataru Sakata, Director General of Japan Customs. Dr. Mikuriya explained that the WCO and JICA agreed to launch the MTP for the Pacific Islands based on their needs and priorities which were recognized during Dr. Mikuriya's visit to the Pacific Islands Economies. He emphasized that the creation of a pool of Customs experts in the Pacific region will enhance the human network in the Pacific region which will facilitate regional cooperation in sharing information and best practices.

During the ceremony, six Customs Administrations in the Pacific Islands and the OCO demonstrated their strong commitments to developing a pool of experts in the region for sustainable development of the Pacific Islands. Furthermore, the participants and the OCO Secretariat expressed their appreciation to the WCO, the JICA, Japan Customs and the ROCB A/P.

The ceremony concluded with the remarks of Mr. Ricardo Treviño Chapa, Deputy Secretary General. He highlighted that the strong commitments from six Customs Administrations, which are key to the success of the MTP, are well confirmed at this ceremony. He concluded his remarks by thanking the JICA, Japan Customs, Members of the Pacific Islands, the OCO and the ROCB A/P for their cooperation.

ROCB A/P collaborates Intelligence Experts of Asia and the Pacific

7 - 8 Sept 2021, Bangkok, Thailand



At the invitation of the of Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific (RILO A/P), Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto, Head of ROCB A/P participated 32nd Administrative Meeting for National Contact Points of Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific (RILO A/P NCP Meeting) held virtually on 7 - 8 September 2021. Program Manager of the ROCB A/P, Ms. Sherman Yu also joined the meeting to provide support.

The meeting was chaired by Bangladesh Customs and RILO A/P was the co-host. Dr. Md. Abdur Rouf, Director General of Customs Intelligence & Investigation Directorate, Bangladesh Customs delivered the welcoming remarks. In his speech, he highlighted the importance of intelligence exchange in combatting smuggling of contrabands in the region. He also took the opportunity to thank participants for joining this meaningful meeting. Following Mr. Rahman's speech, representatives from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), RILO A/P, AP members and experts from WCO took turn to deliver their presentations.

Mr. Norikazu delivered a presentation to introduce the ROCB A/P and provide an overview of the upcoming capacity building activities especially for intelligence experts as well as useful ROCB A/P's publication function and materials. He also encouraged intelligence experts to actively participate capacity building activities in this fiscal year hosted by ROCB A/P. Since both RILO A/P and ROCB A/P shouldered the role to coordinating and consolidating regional activities. Mr. Norikazu expressed wishes that both offices will work hand in hand in near future.

During the meeting, respective Customs administrations shared their best practices by

utilizing intelligence in their daily operation to increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness. Case statistics, details and views on smuggling trend were shared and discussed during the presentations. All participants agreed that closer cooperation and more intelligence exchange are vital to uphold the enforcement effort in the region.

ROCB A/P joined International Canine Seminar on Drug Anti-smuggling by Russian Customs

22 - 23 Sept 2021, Moscow, Russia by online



At the invitation of the Dog Training Centre of the Federal Customs Service (FCS) in Russia, Mr. Ilkwon HAN, Program Manager of ROCB A/P participated the International Canine Seminar on Drug Anti-smuggling held virtually on 22 - 23 September 2021 with simultaneous translation service.

The seminar was moderated by Mr. Vitaliy Sobolev, head of the International Cooperation Unit of the FCS Dog Training Centre, and for the information sharing on canine function and drug seizures in the Customs administrations from 11 countries, namely Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mongolia, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, Tajikistan.

Mr. Ilkwon HAN delivered a presentation to introduce the ROCB A/P and to provide an overview of WCO AP Regional Canine Workshop in June 2021, co-hosted by ROCB AP and Korea Customs Service (RDTC Korea). In addition, He highlighted the contents of Good Customs

Practice Report on Canine Training and Operations in AP region which was issued by ROCB AP in July 2021. It is great honored to receive many compliments from the participating members for sharing useful information about Canine Operations of Asia Pacific Members as a good reference.

During the seminar, respective Customs administrations shared their best practices by Canine functions in their daily operation to increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness. Details of canine activities and drug seizure cases were shared and discussed during the presentations.

Pacific Islands' Members took a big step towards being Master Trainers

27 September – 1 October 2021, Online Workshop hosted by ROCB A/P



The first WCO/JICA Joint Sub-Regional Working Group Activity for Master Trainer Programme (MTP) on Customs Valuation for the Pacific Islands was held online from 27 September to 1 October 2021. The Working Group Activity was organized by the WCO and JICA with the support of ROCB A/P. A total of 11 participants representing six WCO Members in the Pacific region, namely Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu as well as the Acting Head of Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) Secretariat attended the Working Group Activity. Together with the experts on Customs Valuation from the WCO, Japan Customs and Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA), Mr. Noriakzu Kuramoto, Head, Ms. Yuko Mamiya, Program Manager.

Ms. Jate-arpa Benjaphong, Program Coordinator, Ms. Vareemon Chairungsilert, and Ms. Kanyawarat Sitthikunpanit, Program Coordinator of the ROCB A/P, also attended to assist in organizing the Working Group Activity.

With the aim to develop a pool of well-experienced trainers, training materials and programs to be used by these trainers, the experts shared their knowledge and experience on Customs Valuation with the participants who are expected to be quality trainers. Mr. Kuramoto delivered a presentation on capacity building activities in the AP region. In the course of the Working Group Activity, the participants actively shared and discussed their key issues and challenges that they are facing relating to Customs valuation as well as their experiences in ensuring uniform application of the WTO Valuation Agreement and delivering Customs Valuation training. At the end of this Working Group Activity, the participants developed their collective work plan to achieve the objectives of the MTP through the progressive follow-up activities.

Participants' active contribution resulted in the successful Working Group Activity and this Activity strengthened the relationship between the WCO, JICA, experts, participants and ROCB A/P. The participants expressed their appreciation to the WCO, the JICA, Japan Customs, experts and the ROCB A/P.

Opening Ceremony of ROCB A/P renovated office

29 September 2021, Bangkok Thailand



With the hospitality and assistance given by Thai Customs Department (TCD) as our host administration, we celebrate the opening renovated office of ROCB A/P on 29 September 2021.

Mr. Patchara Anuntasilpa, Director-General of Thai Customs Department officiated the opening ceremony of renovated office with its executives. Mr. Norikazu Kuramoto, the Head of the ROCB A/P delivered a speech to express his heartfelt gratitude towards TCD for their ongoing support, generosity and close collaboration that fostered profoundly. This ceremony signified this important milestone and ROCB A/P will continue to provide as well as coordinate regional capacity building activities in this new office.

ROCB A/P set up their office in Bangkok, Thailand since 2004. Throughout all these years, TCD not only provided physical office accommodation and office equipment to ROCB A/P, but also deployed staff working in ROCB A/P to provide support so that our office can run smoothly and efficiently. To further enhance the facilities and capacity of ROCB A/P, TCD approved the renovation project and the works was completed in September 2021.

Welcome Message from Ms. Zhengqing (Grace) Ye



I am YE Zhengqing (Grace) from China Customs. It is my great pleasure and honor to join ROCB A/P.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to introduce myself. After obtaining my Master's Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I started working at the RTC-China, Shanghai Customs College (SCC) as a capacity building program manager for almost 10 years. During the last 10 years, I actively involved in all the WCO workshops held at RTC-China and was responsible for WCO PICARD Program. In 2020, after meeting with WCO experts from Capacity Building Directorate in Brussels, I was invited to write an article on "Shanghai Customs College opens to the world" introducing how SCC, as one of the regional training centers, implemented its capacity building programs which was published at WCO NEWS.

As we all know, the achievements of the ROCB A/P since its creation are many. However, the opportunities to improve and the challenges ahead are significant. This year, despite the unprecedented situation with restrictive measures generated by the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the working environment, ROCB A/P continues to provide the Members in AP region with Customs Capacity Building in creative, diverse and inspiring ways. As a program manager of ROCB A/P, I hope my experience at RTC-China can contribute to the ROCB A/P and assist my colleagues to achieve ROCB A/P's mission that is to perform effective and efficient capacity building activities in close cooperation with regional members.

I am looking forward to working with you!

Farewell message from Ms. Pattarapak Nopnakeepong

Dear my friends of Asia Pacific region,

July 16th was the last day I worked at ROCB A/P. Because I have to move to another department of Thai Customs. Time flies really quick! Especially when having a great time! I really appreciate the opportunity I had here to grow in my career and be a part of the WCO ROCB A/P team.



I'll never forget the experiences I had working here! I have enjoyed my tenure here. It's been a fruitful and productive year for me. Not only the working time but also off-duty time, we spent good time together. I enjoyed spending time with them. It was a very precious moment!

I really feel lucky to have met ROCB A/P colleagues. They have been a strong influence on my professional career. I've learned a lot from them during my time here. Working here in an international environment had encouraged me to learn to work with many experienced professionals from different countries.



However, the truth is that nothing lasts forever. It's time for me to leave here. Thank you all very much and good luck for everyone! Please keep in touch. Until we meet again. (Bye)

Welcome Message from Ms. Kanyawarat SITTHIKUNPANIT

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Kanyawarat SITTHIKUNPANIT. My nickname is Ploy. I'm the new staff at ROCB A/P for the Program Coordinator position.

First of all, I'd like to say that I am really grateful for this opportunity to be a part of the ROCB A/P team. To be given this opportunity has been incredible for me. As I would like to work in an international organization since I was young.

As I want to work with an international organization since I was young, my work experience had with many international firms for example; Software Development companies and eCommerce companies. I was working there as an Executive Assistant, my routine work was coordinated with the Development team and Marketing team to support ongoing and pitching projects in various industries.

And for an eCommerce company, I joined the team as the first Thai account manager for the Sales and Marketing teams. Responsible for business partnership and account management.

Taking this opportunity would be a challenging step in my life also in my career path as well. I am glad to be selected from ROCB A/P and I believe working here could help me gain a lot of experiences such as learning how to work in a world-class organization, learn how to work with foreigners and the most important thing is knowledge of the Customs.

I look forward to working with Asia Pacific Members soon.



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