

SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF NATIONAL CUSTOMS DIRECTORS OF LATIN AMERICA, SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

The seventeenth Meeting of National Customs Directors of Latin America, Spain and Portugal was held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia from 27 to 31 January 1997. The meeting was attended by representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela. Observers from Australia, France, Japan and the United States were also present. Representatives of the following international organizations also attended the meeting: Association of Customs Agents of Uruguay, International Association of Professional Customs Agents (ASAPRA), Latin American Integration Organization (LAIA), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Latin American Convention of Courier Enterprises (CLADEC), Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE), Board of the Cartagena Agreement (JUNAC), Organization of American States (OAS), World Customs Organization (WCO), and Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal (PUASP).

Among other things the Meeting agreed to:

Courier Regulations

- Recommend that Member States modify their own sets of laws, using as their general reference the Regulations Governing Exportation and Importation Via Express Carrier, introduced at the meeting by the delegation of Chile.

Strengthening initiatives established under the Multilateral Convention

- Express appreciation to the convention secretariat for the activities undertaken and for the humility and courage it showed when outlining its financial situation.
- Entrust the secretariat with the task of presenting within a reasonable period a proposal for obtaining the resources required to implement the Convention.

Comparative analysis of legislation pertaining to customs agents

- Express deep appreciation to the delegation of Chile for the activities undertaken.
- Urge member States that have yet to inform Chile of their legislation on the subject, together with those States whose laws have been amended, that they proceed to do so in order that they can be included in the comparative analysis.
- Accept the offer of the Chilean National Customs Department to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the duties of customs agents in each member State.

Customs valuation; the specific nature of customs services

- Reiterate that the task of valuation is the full and absolute responsibility of national customs departments, as the concession of that function to private interests is not advisable; this notwithstanding, it is recommended that such services be contracted out under exceptional circumstances and for short periods of time, given that they tie up substantial resources that would be better put towards strengthening valuation areas that could be complemented by cooperation agreements between countries and the collaboration of the World Customs Organization.

With a view to strengthening valuation areas, the following plan of action is recommended:

- a) Countries that do not currently have contracts with pre-shipment inspection companies should be advised to formulate a prevention plan whose purpose is to prevent the signing of such contracts in the future; such a plan should at a minimum encompass the strengthening of the valuation component in terms of staff, automation, information clearing houses, the setting up of a valuation data bank, and the resource base necessary for the development of its functions.
- b) Countries that currently do have contracts with pre-shipment inspection companies should be advised to implement an adjustment plan aimed at optimizing the experience gained from the participation of these companies. This plan should at the least provide for the following:
 - i. Continued compliance with contracts signed with pre-shipment inspection companies, and insistence that contractual arrangements be strictly observed.
 - ii. Strengthening of valuation units within customs services, independently of inspection companies, in terms of staff, automation, information clearing houses, the setting up of a valuation data bank, and other resources vital to the performance of their duties.
 - iii. A request for high-level government officials of member States to support the strengthening of the valuation unit and for customs services to reinforce their substantive roles.
- c) Countries should be requested to send the convention secretariat by no later than 30 June 1997 information on the hiring and performance of pre-shipment inspection companies in their own countries over the previous five-year period.
- d) The convention secretariat should be instructed to compile the information sent by the countries on this subject and condense it into a document for presentation at the eighteenth Meeting of Directors.
- e) The delegations of Bolivia and Spain should be put in charge of monitoring compliance with this plan of action; additionally, these delegations should be requested to provide the convention secretariat with the technical cooperation necessary for the fulfilment of this recommendation.

Draft agreement on international customs transit

- Express appreciation to the Latin American Integration Organization (LAIA) for its participation in the present meeting, which LAIA reports it will have soon completed the task entrusted to it regarding the drafting of an international agreement on this issue.

Latin American Training System

Report on Training Seminars conducted during 1995 and the proposal for the holding of seminars and training courses during 1997

- Express gratitude to Mexico, Spain, Chile, Brazil, WCO and OAS for training courses held during 1996, as well as the training proposal for 1997, consisting of the following courses and seminars:
 - - - Seminar on intellectual property (Mexico-United States).
 - First Inter-American seminar on the draft of explanatory notes for the Harmonized Tariff System.
 - Seminar on modernization of customs services (Chile-WCO).
 - Sixth Inter-American seminar on customs valuation, commercial fraud and customs irregularities. (Mexico-OAS).
 - Seminar on customs procedures (Brazil).
 - Seminar on customs procedures (Spain).
- Ask the secretariat to approach the countries with a proposal to hold a joint meeting of customs and port authorities.
- Express gratitude to the Secretary General of the WCO for the proposal made to the forum on training modules in the Spanish language.
- Recommend that States members of the Convention requiring training support from WCO should request such support without delay directly from the organization itself, as provided for by the proposal of its Secretary General.

Experience acquired in the fight against commercial fraud and drug trafficking

- Express appreciation to the delegations of Argentina, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Portugal and Spain for their presentations regarding this issue, as these represent a valuable contribution in the fight against commercial fraud and customs irregularities.
- Recommend that member States undertake actions to prevent and combat commercial fraud and customs irregularities.
- Accept the recommendations made by the delegation of Cuba in respect of the "fight against drug trafficking", which call on those countries that have yet to ratify Annex XI of the Convention to do so as soon as possible and for this issue to be placed on the agenda of future meetings.

Customs modernization

- Express gratitude to the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization for his well-grounded presentation, and for the distribution of material which is of great assistance in the modernization drive begun by our countries.
- Express appreciation to the delegations of Venezuela and Bolivia for their presentations on experiences with regard to modernization processes.
- Request the delegation of Argentina to carry out a comparative study on the experiences of Member States as regards the financing of modernization.
- Take into consideration, in the context of the modernization of Member States' customs procedures, the principles put forward by the delegation of Spain, consisting of: upgrading current technical methods, automating of information, and enhancing international cooperation, to ensure that customs do not act as an impediment to foreign trade.
- Ask the convention secretariat, when drawing up the agendas of future meetings, to allocate sufficient time to the exposition and discussion of significant issues, including, inter alia, valuation, commercial fraud and customs irregularities, customs modernization, and automation.

The advisability of bilateral cooperation agreements between customs services of neighbouring countries

- Express gratitude to the delegation of Bolivia for bringing up this issue.
- Advocate that Member States sign agreements cooperation between their respective customs services, since they represent a valuable supervisory tool.

The role of Customs Administrations in the context of Mercosur and the Andean Pact

- Express appreciation to the Board of the Cartagena Agreement (JUNAC) for its presentation on the work undertaken in the context of the Andean Pact, and to the delegations of Argentina and Paraguay for their statements on Mercosur.
- Recommend to the Governments that their customs services participate in the negotiation and review both of rules of origin, and of existing conventions and treaties.

Presentations of invited international organizations and States

- Express appreciation on behalf of the forum to the delegation of Japan for the technical assistance provided to the region's customs services, and for the offer of future assistance.
- Thank the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE) for its contribution to the meeting and for the support provided to the countries of Central America in the area of customs modernization.

Links between postal systems and customs services

- Express gratitude to the representative of the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal (PUASP) for his contribution to the meeting.
- Recommend that the subject of links between postal systems and customs services be included on the agenda of the next meeting, with a view to studying the draft recommendation presented, replacing the text under section 2 of the draft with the following text: "To strengthen coordination between postal systems and customs services".

Selection of the host for the next meeting

- Accept the offer by the delegations of Venezuela and Paraguay to act as official and alternate host respectively, for the eighteenth Meeting of National Customs Directors scheduled to take place in October 1997.
- Accept the offer by the delegations of Spain and Chile to act as official and alternate host respectively, for the nineteenth Meeting.
- Express gratitude to the Republic of Bolivia for the excellent organization and coordination of the seventeenth Meeting.

SIXTEENTH ALACAT CONGRESS AND EXHIBITION TO BE HELD IN LIMA IN AUGUST 1997 TO DISCUSS REQUIREMENTS FOR THE FACILITATION OF TRANSPORT

Topics such as the facilitation of international transport, outsourcing as a new business practice, the growth of air transport, the modernization of shipping and overland transport, activities that have an impact on international transport, customs, logistics and safety standards are just some of the issues which will be examined in detail at the Congress of the Latin American and Caribbean Federation of National Associations of Cargo Agents, ALACAT '97, which will be held at the Sheraton Hotel in Lima from 17 to 19 August 1997.

This, the sixteenth Congress and Exhibition, will be attended by high-level transport officials, and representatives of members of ALACAT from Latin America and the Caribbean, United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. Cargo agents, importers, exporters, businesspeople, port authorities, customs and insurance agents, representatives of airlines, shipping firms, railway companies and overland transport operators, non-vessel-operating common carriers, warehouse companies, and brokers, among others, will discuss a broad range of topics related to the facilitation of transport, leading to the recommendation of proposals and solutions to the countries of the region. An exhibition featuring 50 stands will be held concurrently, with a view to promoting business deals among the participants. This announcement was made by Mr. Gino Roberti, President of the Peruvian Association of International Cargo Agents (APACIT), which is officially in charge of organizing this event.

"The Lima Congress will be of crucial importance in the assessment of the transport facilitation policies required for the next millennium. Even today there are barriers and regulations that prevent the full competitive potential of the private sector from being harnessed. There will be opportunities in the future", said Mr. Roberti.

Such is the pace at which privatization is going ahead that Latin America is positioning itself as an emerging, mature market. The macroeconomic growth indicators point to positive results from the elimination of red tape and the processes of transfer and economic liberalization accomplished to date; capitalization policies, tendering programmes and the granting of concessions would appear to be the keys to success. Today Latin America has one goal in mind: to become competitive.

Lastly, Mr. Roberti declared that, "Latin America is undergoing far-reaching changes in its entire social order. Peru has privatized more than 70% of its enterprises. The Government is set to award investors specialized in public works the concession for managing motorways, railways, oil

pipelines and all ports. Within two years, Peru will have virtually no state-owned enterprises. We have witnessed spectacular growth. Exports have expanded by some 75% over the past five years, and this has forced us to take a long hard look at our sector's requirements." For further information please contact Ms. Marisol Valdez , PHONE/FAX: (51-1) 422-6162 // 421-0400 // 221-5704.