

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT
EIGHTH MEETING OF THE ASEAN DIRECTORS-GENERAL OF CUSTOMS
28-29 July 2000, Yangon, Myanmar

1. The Eighth Meeting of the ASEAN Directors-General of Customs was held on 28-29 July 2000 in Yangon, Myanmar.
2. Attending the Meeting were: Mr. Eussoff Agaki, Controller of Royal Customs and Excise, Brunei Darussalam; Mr. Pen Siman, Delegate of the Royal Government in charge of Customs and Excise Department, Cambodia; Dr. Permana Agung, Director-General of Customs and Excise, Indonesia; Mr. Santiphab Phomvihane, Deputy Director-General of Customs, Lao PDR; Datuk Ahmad Padzli Bin Mohyiddin, Director-General of Royal Customs and Excise Department, Malaysia; Mr. Tun Chun, Director-General of Customs, Myanmar; Ms. Julita S. Manahan, Deputy Commissioner of Bureau of Customs, Philippines; Mr. Koh Chong Hwa, Director-General of Customs and Excise Department, Singapore; Mr. Somchainuk Engrakul, Director-General of Royal Thai Customs Department, Thailand; Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Tuc, Deputy Director-General of the General Department of Customs, Vietnam; and their respective delegations. Staff of the ASEAN Secretariat were also in attendance.
3. Mr Tun Chun, Director-General of Customs, Myanmar, chaired the meeting.

Opening Ceremony

4. The Meeting was preceded by an Opening Ceremony where H. E. U Khin Maung Thein, Minister for Finance and Revenue of Myanmar, delivered his welcoming remarks. The Minister welcomed the Directors-General to Myanmar and retraced some of the key steps along the way of ASEAN cooperation in customs. These included the signing of the ASEAN Agreement on Customs in March 1997, the adoption of the ASEAN Customs Vision in that same year and the Hanoi Plan of Action during the Sixth ASEAN Summit in 1998. At these key dates, important milestones for ASEAN cooperation in customs were established. He hoped that this Eighth Meeting of the Directors-General would see important progress made in achieving some of these goals.
5. Minister U Khin Maung Thein thanked Japan for the technical assistance provided to ASEAN customs administrations. He recalled that Myanmar had played host to the ASEAN Economic Ministers' (AEM) Retreat and the meeting of the AEM with China, Japan and Korea. The Minister expressed confidence that this will augur greater cooperation between customs administrations of ASEAN and China, Japan and Korea.

Policy Implementation Work Programme

6. The Directors-General reviewed the progress made in the ASEAN Customs Policy Implementation Work Programme (PIWP), which was approved last year in Malaysia. The Directors-General held productive discussions with the Japanese Director-General of Customs and Tariff Bureau on technical cooperation between the two sides as well as international customs issues in the World Customs Organisation (WCO), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Private sector representatives also held a half-day session with the Directors-General to consider ways of facilitating the movement of goods and services in the region.

7. The objective of the PIWP is to work towards the customs vision of world-class customs service. It contains fifteen major areas of work – post clearance audit, cargo processing, customs valuation, tariff nomenclature, customs transit, automation, enforcement, temporary admission, strategic planning and management, mutual assistance, transparency enhancement, training and human resource development, technical assistance to new members of ASEAN (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam), international customs fora and partnership with the business community.

8. The Directors-General noted that Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have already implemented the WTO Valuation Agreement. They encouraged other Member Countries to do so as soon as possible. The Directors-General welcomed the technical assistance that was provided by New Zealand Customs Service on the implementation of the WTO Valuation Agreement to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam and expressed the hope that this would continue as the new members prepare themselves for ultimate implementation of the Agreement.

9. The Directors-General noted the important progress made in the area of post-clearance audit. They were pleased to note that a two-day workshop on customs post clearance audit (PCA) had been held in November 1999, where ASEAN customs officials and experts from Japan's Customs and Tariff Bureau and the Australian Customs Service shared their experiences and perspectives on the essential elements required to implement post clearance audit. As a follow-up to the workshop, regional guidelines are being drafted to help member countries organize the implementation of PCA nationally. With an effective post-clearance audit system in place, customs can expedite clearance of goods at the border while more thorough checks or audits could be undertaken after the goods are released.

10. The Directors-General recalled that at their last meeting, they had recommended implementing the ASEAN Harmonised Tariff Nomenclature (AHTN) in the year 2002, to coincide with the implementation of Harmonised System (HS) 2002. The AHTN is a common tariff nomenclature to be used by ASEAN customs to classify all traded goods. At the same time, the Directors-General had agreed that the draft AHTN should be finalised by December 2000. In this connection, they were pleased to learn that the first regional workshop on the AHTN had been held in April 2000 in Jakarta and that an initial draft had been agreed upon. The next workshop, whose objective was to simplify the revised text of the AHTN, was scheduled in mid-August 2000. The Directors-General encouraged all Member Countries to do their utmost to ensure that an agreed text would be completed before the end of the year.

11. The Directors-General recalled the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit in December 1998. They noted that two of the implementing customs protocols - on frontier posts and customs transit system - had been drawn up and expressed the hope that it could be finalised as soon as possible.

12. Noting the increasing use of the Internet as a medium for providing government services, the Directors-General encouraged the continuous development of the ASEAN Customs Homepage (located in www.aseansec.org) to make it as up-to-date as possible with all the latest facilities and services offered by customs authorities to the business community.

Consultations with the Japanese Director-General of Customs

13. The Directors-General met with Mr Tatsumaro Terazawa, Director General of Japan Customs and Tariff Bureau. They briefed Japan on the progress made in implementing the customs PIWP and thanked Japan for its assistance in the work on post clearance audit and tariff nomenclature. They noted that an expert on post clearance audit had been dispatched for a period of 1-2 years to assist ASEAN members' effort to institute post-clearance audit systems. Japan's assistance had also included training in the following areas: Harmonised System and Tariff Classification, Valuation and Post Clearance Audit, Automation and Customs Clearance. The consultations also discussed possible future cooperation to cover the rest of the PIWP.

14. The Directors-General and Mr Terazawa exchanged views on the latest developments in WCO and APEC and agreed to consult closely on further developments in these matters. Mr Terazawa congratulated Brunei Darussalam for its successful organisation of the APEC Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures (SCCP) meeting held this year.

Private Sector Consultations

15. The Directors-General held their fourth annual consultation with representatives of the private sector in ASEAN. On hand for the meeting were the ASEAN Chambers of Commerce and Industry, companies from the Conference of Asia Pacific Express Carriers (FedEx, UPS, DHL, TNT), international consultants Pricewaterhouse Coopers and the Thai Licensed Customs Brokers Association. There was a frank exchange of views between ASEAN customs and the private sector with both sides agreeing on the need to work closely together to address issues of concern to the business community.

16. The Directors-General were delighted to note the partnership between ASEAN customs and the air express carrier industry through Project ACCESS (ASEAN Customs Clearance and Express Services). Project ACCESS was intended to assist ASEAN customs achieve targets outlined in the PIWP as well as to expedite the delivery of express products, which was an important and fast-growing component of the airfreight industry in the region. The Directors-General expressed [assurances that it would] serve as a useful model which could be used with oth[er models].