

Communiqué from the OCO Annual Conference 2024

26th Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Annual Conference

Rarotonga, Cook Islands

29 – 31 July 2024

Theme: “Strengthening Partnerships for Dynamic Solutions and a Future-ready Blue Pacific”

The 26th OCO Annual Conference was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, from 29th to 31st July 2024, under the theme “Strengthening Partnerships for Dynamic Solutions and a Future-ready Blue Pacific.” The conference was attended by Heads of Customs and Senior Customs Representatives from American Samoa, Australia, Commonwealth of Northern Marianas, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, including the Representatives of Regional and International Partners to discuss current and emerging issues, share achievements and experiences, and chart the path forward for Customs modernization and regional cooperation.

Day One Highlights:

- **Opening Ceremony:** The conference commenced with opening remarks by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Honourable Mark Brown, who emphasized the “urgency of regional cooperation and safeguarding the region’s future”. The opening ceremony was also attended by distinguished guests from high commissions and OCO partners. The ceremony emphasized the importance of regional security, trade and the collaborative spirit of the OCO community, regional and international partners.
- **Session One:** Members provided updates on Customs modernization and reform, focusing on initiatives aimed at improving administrative efficiency in alignment with international best practices, reducing corruption, and enhancing effectiveness and addressed key challenges faced by the respective Customs administrations. Key outcomes included reaffirmation of progressing automation, simplifying Customs procedures, enhancing governance and updates on the implementation of the Harmonized System (HS) and Customs Valuation.
- **Session Two:** A panel discussion on enhancing regional trade facilitation through advanced data management and analysis, which also highlighted the benefits of streamlined and integrated Customs procedures. Members and partners shared updates on current trends and challenges in trade facilitation. In addition, Partners elaborated on new functionalities as enablers for performance management and reiterated the importance of data management for optimal results.

Day Two Highlights:

- **Session Three:** Discussions on securing global supply chains underscored the need for advanced cargo screening technologies and risk-based inspection protocols. Updates from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Australia on Transnational Serious Organised Crime were the highlights of this session, and the World Shipping Council emphasized the importance of supply chain security.

- **Session Four:** Panel discussions on “Emerging trends in Pacific trade and logistics” were examined, including the growth of e-commerce and its impact. Kiribati, PNG, New Zealand and PIFS shared their experience, progress on e-commerce initiatives and discussed the future of trade logistics in the region.
- **Session Five:** Efforts to combat illicit trade and transnational crime were addressed by Panellists, focusing on smuggling, money laundering and trafficking of drugs and counterfeits. The session emphasized the need for coordination, sharing expertise, standardized processes, procedures and intelligence products.
- **Session Six:** Presentations on strengthening regional capability through strategic partnerships highlighted capacity building and professional development for Customs officials. Updates on various capacity building programs were shared by regional and international partners.
- **Session Seven:** Partner updates on regional law enforcement, border security, maritime domain awareness and immigration underscored the importance of cooperation and information sharing to address common challenges. The Members noted the significance of modern MDA intelligence tools for maritime security.
- **Session Eight:** The conference addressed gender equality and workplace diversity, with discussions on the encouraging progress and initiatives in these areas within the OCO community. Members and OCO shared their ongoing efforts to embed gender equality and workplace diversity within Customs administrations and strengthening of their activities with members and partners.
- **Session Nine:** The impacts of climate change on Customs operations and the adoption of digital transformative trends were discussed. Strategies for managing disruptions and enhancing efficiency through digital transformation were shared to provide insights into the resilient approach adopted by Customs operations. As part of contingency measures, discussions were convened on the importance of business continuity plans.
- **Session Ten:** The issue of undervaluation in regional trade was explored, focusing on detection, prevention, and collaboration strategies. Members recognise the success of the operation and the benefits of sharing information to effectively target undervaluation. Members pledge to continue the regional collaboration and look forward to future operations in this area.

The conference concluded with a commitment to continue strengthening partnerships and enhancing cooperation among OCO members and partners to ensure a future-ready Customs administration capable of addressing the dynamic challenges of the Pacific region.

Conclusion:

The 26th OCO Annual Conference successfully fostered dialogue, shared valuable insights, and reinforced the commitment of member countries to work collaboratively towards dynamic solutions and a resilient Blue Pacific. The outcomes of the 26th Annual Conference will guide future initiatives and efforts in Customs reform, modernization, trade facilitation, revenue, compliance, enforcement, border security and regional security.

OCO Secretariat

July 2024