



**STATEMENT BY THE ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
*MS ALMA ANDRADE,*

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS DAY**

**26 JANUARY 2023**

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1. May I invite you to join me and my Colleagues at the SACU Secretariat as we celebrate the International Customs Day, under the theme *“Nurturing the next generation: promoting a culture of knowledge-sharing and professional pride in Customs”*. This theme perfectly suites the current global environment, as most countries around the globe are still recovering from the impact of COVID-19 and other economic headwinds affecting international and cross border trade.
2. I wish to also express my gratitude to the World Customs Organisation and the respective Revenue Authorities and Customs Administrations across the world for their continued dedication and tenacity in managing “more than 98% of world trade”. The world depends on Customs to ensure seamless, effective, and secure movement of goods across multiple borders. Amongst others, Customs also contributes significantly to revenue collection in many countries across the world.
3. The theme for 2023 augurs well with the pressing demand to strengthen mutual knowledge to build a solid foundation and base for Customs across the globe. Customs fraternity should be ready all times to respond to global issues affecting international trade ranging from black swan events, wars, pandemics, unrests, cyber security, and other unforeseen events of our times. It is through knowledge and skills that Customs can be enabled and empowered to support governments across the world both during business as usual and during times of crisis.

4. The impeccable work and effort by the Customs community was demonstrated at the peak of the COVID-19 Pandemic with the global coordination of cross border movement of essential supplies. In the same vein, we have also observed gaps in the supply chain that necessitates stronger partnerships, collaboration, and knowledge sharing and exchange of information amongst Customs Administrations and Border Agencies. This will assist Customs to become agile, and to build resilience in the facilitation and management of global trade to ensure business continuity during crisis.
5. It is therefore pleasing to note that the Customs community across the globe dedicates efforts to celebrate and acknowledge the contribution made by their respective Officials to manage and administer international trade globally. This is surely a positive morale booster for the many unsung Customs heroes that are working tirelessly to facilitate trade, collect revenue, enforce compliance and are protecting society through deterrence of entry and circulation of illicit goods in their respective countries.
6. As the SACU region, we have also learnt lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Amongst others, the work on Trade Facilitation and Logistics including Customs Cooperation has been strengthened and refocused to be able to respond to the international trade demands and dynamics. The SACU Trade Facilitation and Logistics Programme focuses on the following:
  - (a) *Customs Cooperation*: simplification and harmonisation of trade procedures and cooperation between the customs administrations;
  - (b) *Border Coordination*: strengthening collaboration and cooperation between border agencies, and between border agencies and the private sector;

- (c) *Behind the Border Measures*: addressing all administrative issues associated with behind the border measures. This includes sharing of administrative information about formalities, documentary requirements, procedures, fees, and charges related to Agriculture, Standards and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS). In addition, the simplification and harmonisation of SPS measures, streamlining the issuance of licenses, administrative and documentary requirements;
- (d) *Coordinated implementation of Trade Agreements* to enhance administration of trade agreements that SACU Member States signs with third parties;
- (e) *Transport and Logistics*: cooperation in the harmonisation and standardisation of cross-border transport regulatory framework and logistical processes, with a view to facilitate trade seamlessly and reduce the cost of moving goods across the borders;
- (f) *Cross-cutting issues*: collaboration among regional Trade Facilitation structures in the Member States and relevant regional stakeholders. In addition, collaboration on specific policy imperatives to be defined based on the agreed principles, objectives, and identified regional projects as well as taking a proactive stance on e-Commerce.

The expected results from the above-mentioned interventions are:

- (a) *improved administrative efficiencies including through digitisation, as well as automation of data exchange;*
- (b) *reduction of time and cost associated with cross-border trade;*
- (c) *improved compliance and security of the supply chain; and*
- (d) *enhanced competitiveness of the SACU Member States.*

7. Some of the key successes recorded under Customs Cooperation within the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme, are:
- (a) *Development of the SACU Regional Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme with Compliance, Safety and Security;*
  - (b) *A total of 161 Accredited Traders under AEO Compliance Programme;*
  - (c) *Development of Frameworks for automated exchange of Customs data;*
  - (d) *Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Namibia are enabled to automatically exchange Customs data with South Africa, with efforts underway to improve data match for import and exports through the IT Connectivity Programme;*
  - (e) *Legal frameworks are put in place to enable data exchange and work is underway to complete framework for Mutual Recognition of Authorised Economic Operators;*
  - (f) *Migration from HS 2017 to HS 2022. Work is underway through the support from the WCO enhance administration and management of the HS Nomenclature, i.e. the tariff book in SACU;*
  - (g) *Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Tool;*
  - (h) *Continuous training, exchange of skills and knowledge amongst Customs Officials in SACU. To date, multiple training and exchange of knowledge session were conducted to strengthen regional capacity on, amongst others, Authorised Economic Operator Programme; Monitoring and Evaluation; IT Connectivity including WCO Data Model; Digitalization; Business Continuity and Operational Resilience; and Standards; Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures; Technical Barriers to Trade; and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs).*
  - (i) *Issuance of more than 1000 Certificates of Participation in various training and skills exchange session for Customs Officials.*

8. In addition to the above, an Operational Plan is being developed and it will be used to guide full implementation of the SACU Trade Facilitation and Logistics Programme. This will also articulate new projects to be pursued in the various areas of focus.
9. Based on the above, it is clear that the ambition of SACU to accelerate implementation of the SACU Trade Facilitation and Logistics Programme require solid knowledge based and foundation for Customs and multiple stakeholders that are mandated to facilitate trade. Working with our partners and stakeholders, we stand ready to nurture the next generation and to promote a culture of knowledge-sharing and professional pride in Customs.
10. A big thank you to the SACU Heads of Customs from Botswana Unified Revenue Service; Eswatini Revenue Authority; Lesotho Revenue Authority; Namibia Revenue Authority; and South Africa Revenue Service and their respective Officials for their leadership and dedication towards enhancing and strengthening cooperation and collaboration on Customs in SACU under the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme. The abovementioned achievements and successes recorded clearly demonstrate the level of commitment on the part of Customs in the SACU region.
11. Let me also thank and acknowledge the financial and technical support from all our partners that we have worked with previously and recently to progress the work of Customs in SACU. These include the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Government of the United Kingdom (UK).
12. **I wish all the SACU Revenue Authorities and their Customs Officials, as well as the Customs Community across the world a Happy International Customs Day!**