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**MISSION STATEMENT:
WCO Sec-Gen exclusive**

Mission statement

In an exclusive feature for Cargo Security International, the newly-appointed Secretary General of the World Customs Organization, Kunio Mikuriya, outlines his view of the trade and security challenges and opportunities facing the organisation in the opening years of the 21st Century

Before taking up his position as Secretary General of the World Customs Organization on 1 January 2009, Kunio Mikuriya spent seven years as the organisation's Deputy Secretary General. Prior to joining the WCO, he worked for Japan's Ministry of Finance for 25 years. During his career with the Ministry, Kunio occupied a variety of senior posts, which have given him broad experience in Customs, development, budget and financial policies. He also spent time at the Japanese Mission to the World Trade Organization in Geneva and participated in the Uruguay Round trade negotiations, which enabled him to acquire an excellent knowledge of trade-related issues. Kunio has a degree in Law from Tokyo University.

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I welcome this opportunity to share my vision for the **World Customs Organization (WCO)** since becoming its 9th Secretary General on 1 January 2009. As I steer the WCO over the next five years, I hope to accomplish two main goals: to ensure much greater responsiveness to the needs of WCO members; and to enhance cooperation with our international public, private and business partners.

These two goals will be underpinned by my commitment to good governance, transparency, integrity, and a real desire on my part to transform the organisation into one that will play a leading role in ensuring that Customs and its partners have the necessary confidence and capacity to contribute meaningfully to the growth of international trade.

Future-proofing Customs

Members of the WCO have already begun to look at the future of border management and border controls, driven by the changes in security threats, the dynamics of international business practices, and current global trading conditions. It is imperative that the Customs community constantly reviews and adapts its business working model in order to eliminate unnecessary barriers that could hinder legitimate trade whilst ensuring that scarce resources are directed at minimising security and other threats.

This 'future-proofing Customs process led to the 174 WCO members adopting their 'Customs in the 21st Century' strategic policy which is currently being further developed under my personal direction within the WCO Secretariat. While we ponder the future and our response, we have taken on board current world events such as the global financial crisis and its impact on Customs. To enhance the capability of the WCO Secretariat to offer creative solutions to WCO members, I have set up a strategic research centre tasked with examining priority issues. This will help us to chart the way forward for Customs and further assist us in determining any capacity building gaps and how best we can close them.

An agile organisation

Clearly, being able to adjust quickly to global events which impact on the Customs and trade environment requires an agile organisation; the quick reaction of the WCO and its members to the world economic downturn is a case in point. My efforts to position the WCO to be able to respond positively to these global demands has borne fruit. From the beginning, I have consistently supported the need for the Customs community to join the international effort to sustain confidence in the global trading system. So I was quite happy to note that the recommendations made by the WCO to the G20 leaders in advance of their London Summit in April 2009 were all contained within their official Communiqué.

To play our part, the WCO will be actively promoting trade facilitation to counter protectionist tendencies and we will continue to support the early completion of the Doha development round, particularly the trade facilitation negotiations. In addition, we will be steaming ahead with our Customs modernisation and capacity building programmes in concert with interested donors. We are convinced that these actions will lead to trade improvements and greatly assist Customs to cope during the global downturn. As the Customs community sets about playing its part, the WCO Secretariat will be monitoring developments on the ground as requested of international organisations by the G20 leaders. Indeed, while recognising that trade is the motor for economic recovery and future growth, the Customs community must still remain vigilant as revenue collection can be harmed by ever increasing commercial fraud especially during these trying economic times.

Wider implementation

This then leads me to stress the importance for Customs to base its activities on improved risk management as advocated in the *WCO Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC)* which deals with the simplification and harmonisation of Customs procedures and which is a

blueprint for modern and effective Customs procedures in the 21st Century. Indeed, the RKC is also acknowledged by the WTO as an excellent source of reference for Doha trade facilitation negotiators. Accessions to this critical instrument will have to be stepped up as it forms the foundation of many Customs activities. I will be doing more work in this area to convince governments of its necessity and will, where possible, harness the goodwill of business to support my efforts. Wide implementation of the RKC is after all a win-win situation for all trade stakeholders.

The WCO *SAFE Framework of Standards* to secure and facilitate global trade is another instrument that I shall keep under focus as it is a fundamental element of our risk-based approach to security and facilitation. In fact, the SAFE Framework, which was adopted in 2005, has shifted the attention of Customs from traditional controls at the point of import to the entire trade supply chain. In this way, Customs is expected to act as a global network that assesses security risks based on advance electronic information as early as possible in the supply chain. This scheme requires standardised cargo data elements based on the WCO Data Model and consistent risk management to facilitate customs-to-customs networking arrangements and customs-to-business cooperation – the two key pillars underpinning the SAFE Framework of Standards.

Co-ordinated border management

Of course, as the Customs community looks for ways and means to enhance border controls, it has recognised that this can only be done through cooperation at national borders. I will therefore be leading efforts to examine how we can work with other government agencies at borders to ensure that our efforts are coordinated. In this respect the WCO is already discussing the introduction of a third pillar in the SAFE Framework, namely, the customs-to-government pillar. Our efforts to promote co-ordinated border management will be further advanced at a meeting to be held

during the course of 2009 where we will begin efforts to work more closely with agencies that also have border responsibilities. This dialogue will be extended to members of the trade too.

Customs-trade partnership

It goes without saying that the Customs-trade partnership is obviously indispensable to the successful implementation of the SAFE Framework and other WCO instruments and tools, including efforts to ensure faster processing times for goods at borders. Not only does the Framework recommend a host of facilitation benefits for businesses whose cargo security arrangements meet established standards, it also offers compliant traders the possibility to be recognised as *Authorised Economic Operators (AEO)* – one of the most important benefits being mutual recognition of this status by other Customs administrations.

I am pleased that some countries have already concluded mutual recognition agreements and that others are under consideration. While there are slight differences in focus to reflect each country's own priorities, nonetheless, it is important that AEO programmes are compatible and consistent with the standards contained in the SAFE Framework. In this regard, I am actively encouraging faster global recognition while accepting that this may happen slowly but progressively as more and more Customs administrations conclude agreements among one another.

Trade recovery is another area which I am driving and which will require the active participation of our business partners. We have to be prepared for all eventualities, particularly if global trade is severely compromised through a major terrorist incident, for example. Should Customs be faced with such a scenario, it is imperative that we have an action plan in place to ensure fast recovery, given the importance of trade to economic stability.

Capacity building

All our efforts centre on Customs and its partners being able to implement

programmes and initiatives. This also extends to wider accession to WCO instruments. Here, Customs capacity building comes to the fore. I am determined to ensure that Customs has the necessary capacity, knowledge and skills. I shall be delivering enhanced capacity building to WCO members through innovative solutions and more extensive use of technology. I am convinced that promoting the sharing of experience and best practice among Customs administrations will motivate them to introduce reform and modernisation programmes based on internationally accepted standards, particularly those contained within many WCO instruments. This capacity building must be focused, customised and result in the successful transfer of cutting-edge knowledge.

Whilst improving the capacity of our members, the WCO also continues to maintain a parallel knowledge-enrichment programme for representatives of the trade. These private sector training courses are designed to enhance the relationship between Customs and the business community, and lead to an even better Customs compliance culture among trade stakeholders.

Ready for the future

Customs and its stakeholders are ready to take advantage of the opportunities that the 21st Century international trade landscape provides, and to tackle any challenges effectively and with confidence. The WCO is striving to ensure that it becomes a better organisation that is more in tune with its members' needs, and more in tune with the requirements of its business partners. Collectively, we acknowledge the importance of trade whilst rejecting toxic and illicit trade.

We have already taken the first steps towards a new Customs environment which will meet the needs of all trade role-players. With this in mind, I will continue to work closely with WCO members and the business community to ensure that we do not lose momentum.