

Regional Organizations Cooperation Mechanism for Trade Facilitation (ROC-TF) Summary of Third Annual Meeting

23rd September 2014

United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok, Thailand

The third annual meeting of the Regional Organizations Cooperation Mechanism for Trade Facilitation (ROC-TF) was held in Bangkok, Thailand as a side-event of the Asia Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (APTFF) 2014. Thirteen international and regional organizations attended the meeting. A representative from each organization provided a brief update on the organization's activities in trade facilitation in the Asia-Pacific. The meeting also discussed ways to improve information sharing and collaboration within the mechanism. A number of new organizations participated in this year's ROC-TF meeting, including the Greater Mekong Secretariat Business Forum (GMS-BF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

The meeting began with a brief update on the activities of ROC-TF, since the last meeting held in Beijing, China in September 2013, by Ms. Maame Agyeben. She noted that two ROC-TF newsletters had been released as well as annual calendar of activities, which had been circulated amongst member organizations. She noted that newsletters would focus increasingly on knowledge products and feature collaboration between member organizations more prominently. She also requested timely submission of contributions to the newsletter and joint calendar.

Mr. Yann Duval, Chief of the Trade Facilitation Unit of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) presented on the key activities and work of ESCAP in trade facilitation. He highlighted the August 2014 update to the ESCAP-World Bank Trade cost database; the Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation; and the newly developed Trade Cost Database. He also informed the meeting of the ongoing negotiations of the Regional Arrangement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade.

Mr. Shintaro Hamanaka of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) presented on the work of the ADB's Office of Regional Economic Integration (OREI). He noted the work of the office in capacity building and research on trade facilitation, including analysis of the impact of trade facilitation on trade cost and trade flows. Mr. Ronald Butiong, Unit Head of South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program, highlighted the three broad areas of ADB's trade facilitation assistance to SASEC namely: (i) SASEC Trade Facilitation Program (STFP) loans and grants; (ii) provision of technical assistance and support for capacity building and discussion platforms; and (iii) support for implementation of the SASEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework (TFSF). Ms. Rosalind McKenzie, Regional Cooperation Specialist, gave further insight into the work being done in knowledge generation and dissemination on the SASEC platform. Mr. Jeff Procak, Regional Cooperation Specialist, highlighted the trade facilitation work of ADB under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program. In particular, he highlighted some of the key achievements through the CAREC Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy. He also noted the ongoing work in the improvement of border services; the development of border-crossing points and the further development of single window investments in the CAREC region.

Mr. Seung Kyoo Lee, Programme Manager, World Customs Organization Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (AP ROCB) and Mr. Toshihiko Osawa, Technical Officer, World Customs Organization (WCO) delivered a joint presentation highlighting the work of WCO is providing guidance

on the implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA). It was also noted that the WCO working group on the TFA sought to provide a platform for Members to share experiences regarding the implementation of the TFA; to coordinate with the donor community and to engage with other international organizations and bodies, as well as with the private sector.

Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith, Representative and Director of the UNIDO Regional Office, highlighted the key aspects under the UNIDO priority thematic area of the Trade Capacity Building in the Asia-Pacific, which include the harmonization of compliance requirements; mutual recognition of conformity through quality infrastructures at national and regional levels; and strengthening the enquiry points for WTO technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary (TBT-SPS) to contribute to the simplification of trade flows. The presenter also noted UNIDO's ongoing trade facilitation work in Myanmar, Pakistan, India, the Mekong, South-Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) regions.

Mr. Mahmood Zargar, General Secretary of the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT), informed that the meeting of AFACT's objective to promote the development of trade facilitation, electronic business policies and activities in the Asia Pacific region, especially through the promotion of UN/CEFACT guidelines. He noted the work of the AFACT working groups, which promote the guidelines for electronic business and trusted communications platforms.

Mr. Allwyn Netto, Head of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Secretariat, provided with the meeting of an overview of work of the OCO as well as the diversity of the organizations membership. Mr. Netto stated the mandate of the OCO Secretariat was to assist members improve on efficiency and effectiveness of their customs administrations. He informed the meeting of Trade Facilitation in Customs Cooperations (TFCC) project, which the OCO was implementing in order to enhance competitiveness and trade amongst its member States.

Mr. Kang Boosung, Senior Advisor in Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) noted that the key focus of the work of GTI was the deregulation of border crossing procedures for goods and the removal of bottlenecks to enhance trade in Greater Tumen Region in accordance with the 2006-2015 Strategic Action Plan.

Mr. Mohammad Ibrahim Ghafoori, Director in SAARC Secretariat, noted the on-going work of the SAARC Group on Customs Cooperation in the harmonization of customs documentation and procedures by member states. He also noted that the SAARC Secretariat was working on the inter-operability of systems being followed by customs administrations and the preparation of simplified customs declaration forms for trade in goods in the SAARC region.

Mr. Oudet Souvannavong, Secretary General of the GMS-BF, informed the meeting of the work of the GMS-BF as information network for the private sector in the Greater Mekong region. He also noted the work of GMS-BF in organizing technical workshops and training to strengthen the capacity of local chambers of commerce and industry and also the GMS Economic corridors; and the implementation of the Cross-Border Trade Agreement.

Mr. Dennis Pantastico, ASEAN Single Window Lead, delivered a special briefing on the ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment Project (ACTI). He stated the goals of the project were to strengthened regional integration using an operational ASEAN Single Window (ASW) in order to create an improved environment for regional trade and enhance the capacity of ASEAN member states to implement national single windows. He also noted the continued work to implement of trade facilitation reforms in priority industry sectors in collaboration with ADB, ESCAP, and private sector.

Mr. Jose Maria Rubiato noted that UNCTAD was continuing its support to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as an Annex D member organization. He also noted that the work of UNCTAD would be focused on building capacity to guide the trade facilitation implementation plans through research and training activities. He also noted that UNCTAD provides technical assistance to developing countries in the development and implementation of national legal frameworks in line with international legal instruments and standard as well as in the modernization of Customs Administrations procedures.

Ms. Trudy Witbreuk, Head of the Development Division, OECD, informed the meeting that OECD had developed a set of trade facilitation indicators, in order to assist governments to improve border procedures, reduce trade costs and boost trade flows. These indicators form the basis for evidence based policy advice on trade facilitation to governments and also seek to identify areas for action and assess the potential impact of trade facilitation reforms. She noted that trade facilitation developments and best practices in the Asia-Pacific informed the development of the indicators. Ms. Witbreuk also stated that indicators are not intended to be used as a ranking system. The indicators for Asia-Pacific can be accessed from this link: <http://www.oecd.org/tad/facilitation/indicators.htm#Asia-TFI>

Mr. Gerard McLinden, Lead Trade Facilitation Specialist of the World Bank, presented the scope of the World Bank's activities in trade facilitation. The key areas include trade infrastructure investments; logistics and transport services; regional trade facilitation and trade corridors; streamlining documentation requirements; Global Facilitation Partnership for Transportation and Trade (GFP); and the Logistics Performance Index (LPI). Mr. McLinden also informed the meeting of the new multi-donor Trade Facilitation Support Program (TFSP) to provide technical assistance for the TFA. Ms. Christina Busch, GFP coordinator, presented the website www.tfacoordination.org, which provides a platform for the Annex D+ organizations to share information about their work in supporting the implementation of the TFA.

Recommendations:

The final session of the ROC-TF meeting discussed the modalities for the improving the mechanism. The meeting recommended the following to enhance the cooperation of ROC-TF participating organizations:

- Continue the dissemination of the ROC-TF annual calendar and bi-annual newsletter. The ROC-TF newsletter to focus increasingly on knowledge products and feature collaboration between organizations. Organizations are encouraged to provide timely input (regarding their projects, activities, publications, achievements) for the ROC-TF newsletter and calendar;
- Increase the use of the ROC-TF website and seek to establish e-Groups on social media platforms. ROC-TF organizations were also are recommended to link to each other's activities via their websites and social media platforms;
- Establish a regional page for ROC-TF member organizations on the GFP website;
- Nominate official focal points for ROC-TF within each member organization
- Seek more areas of cooperation on research and analysis, and substantive areas in trade facilitation amongst ROC-TF member organizations;
- Continue to invite other organizations to join ROC-TF, including bilateral donors, private sector organizations, etc.

Links to Relevant Websites

ROC-TF: <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/trade-investment/trade-facilitation/roc-tf>

ADB: ADB Industry and Trade: <http://www.adb.org/sectors/industry-and-trade/main>

SASEC Program: <http://sasec.asia/index.php?page=trade-facilitation>

CAREC Program: <http://www.carecprogram.org/index.php?page=trade-facilitation>

AFACT Website: <http://www.afact.org/>

ASEAN Single Window: <http://asw.asean.org/>

GFP Website: www.gfptt.org

Trade Facilitation Agreement Coordination: www.tfacoordination.org

GMS-BF Website: <http://www.gmsbizforum.com/>

OCO Secretariat Website: <http://www.ocosec.org/>

OECD Trade Facilitation: <http://www.oecd.org/trade/facilitation>

Trade Facilitation Indicators Overview Asia-Pacific: http://www.oecd.org/tad/facilitation/Asia_OECD-Trade-Facilitation-Indicators.pdf

SAARC Secretariat: <http://www.saarc-sec.org/>

UNCTAD Transport and Trade Logistics: <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DTL/Trade-Logistics-Branch.aspx>

UNECE Trade: <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/trade-home.html>

UNESCAP Trade Facilitation Unit: <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/trade-investment/trade-facilitation>

United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT):

<http://unnex.t.unescap.org/>

UNIDO Asia Pacific: <http://www.unido.org/asiaandthepacific.html>

UNIDO Trade: <http://www.unido.org/trade.html>

WCO Website: <http://www.wcoomd.org>

WCO Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB A/P): <http://rocb.wcoasiapacific.org/>

World Bank Trade Facilitation and Logistics: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/brief/trade-facilitation-and-logistics>

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