

Opening Remarks

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Seminar on Customs Automation
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Thank you, Honorable Sun Songpu for the warm welcome.

Mr. Vice Minister Sun, Mr. Wang Donghong, distinguished Country Delegates, Resource Persons, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for ADB to co-host this seminar with the China Customs. I would like to take this opportunity to first thank China Customs for their excellent organization of this event.

I would also like to thank the World Customs Organization (WCO) for their continuing and dependable contribution to the capacity building efforts of the CAREC Trade Facilitation Program. We all look forward to working with our resource persons, Mr. Gareth Lewis from the WCO, and Mr. Dietmar Jost, formerly with WCO and a world renowned expert in Customs automation issues.

As many of you are already aware, starting from early this year, the East Asia Regional Department of the ADB will be providing organizational and technical support to the CAREC Trade Facilitation Coordinating Committee.

I would like to thank my ADB colleagues from the Central and West Asia Department for the job well done in establishing and supporting the Committee and also affirm East Asia Department's commitment to working closely with you in the future to further promote cooperation in the Central Asia region.

This seminar was envisaged during the 5th Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC) Meeting held in Astana in October 2006 and further planned in detail during the Seminar on Joint Customs Control and Risk Management in Bangkok in February 2007.

ADB believes that customs automation is one of the most important measures for facilitation of international trade. One has already seen emerging trends in advanced customs organizations and offices, such as paperless environment, utilization of internet, single window processing, and harmonization and standardization of customs procedures. These trends will soon be seen in the CAREC region, arising from close collaboration amongst CAREC participating countries, ADB and other allied organizations.

In fact, there have already been significant developments in the field of customs automation in the CAREC region.

Under the auspices of the CAREC Trade Facilitation Cooperation Program, ADB has had the opportunity to work with Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, and Tajikistan in their efforts to modernize their customs administrations. These included formulation of customs automation master-plans, modernizing information systems, improvement of infrastructure at major customs houses and border posts, and business process reengineering and capacity building.

While automating customs is laudable, there are nevertheless cost and administrative implications, including those from engaging advisers and experts, training for Customs staff and management, and procurement of computer and telecom equipment.

Effective customs automation programs also require effective interoperability among the information exchange systems for ensuring efficiency of border procedures. Cooperation and coordination becomes more essential between the public and private sectors, among border agencies, and between authorities in importing and exporting countries.

The seminar will provide an opportunity for CAREC members to share experiences in customs automation development in their respective countries, and to seek cooperation opportunities.

Apart from having our distinguished resource speakers shed light on customs automation and associated tools, techniques and methodologies, the seminar will also feature the People's Republic of China's experience in information and communication technology in customs processes, particularly in E-port implementation, which could serve as a useful reference or blueprint for development in the area of customs automation.

The seminar will also provide an opportunity for country delegates to engage in face-to-face dialogues, with the aim of (i) developing a working agenda to implement CAREC Trade Facilitation Program initiatives in customs automation, and (ii) discussing bilateral initiatives for data exchanges.

We look forward to your fruitful deliberation and discussion of outstanding issues with your respective counterparts.

We very much welcome the presence of the heads of customs in this seminar. Your attendance clearly denotes CAREC member countries strong commitment to customs automation. I am confident that this seminar will enrich your understanding of customs automation issues and enhance your collaborative endeavors.

Moving forward, in consultation with CAREC member countries, ADB is formulating a new trade facilitation strategy to be discussed at this year's ministerial meeting. We are looking forward to hearing from you regarding this

new strategy in the coming months and plan to share a draft outline for your consideration in June.

Let me close by saying that I am confident that this seminar will provide a valuable contribution to the trade facilitation drive in the CAREC region. I look forward to our discussions.

Thank you very much.