

## The 28th WCO ESA Governing Council Meeting deliberates on the New Regional Strategy 2022-25



Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, launched the World Customs Organisation (WCO) East and Southern Africa (ESA) 28th Governing Council (GC) Meeting at the Integrated Customs Clearance Centre (ICCC) at Le Chaland on Thursday 12 May 2022. The GC was a two-day high level meeting which was attended by some fifty Commissioner Generals and Commissioners of Customs of 24 East and South African countries including Mauritius. The opening ceremony was attended by High Officials of the WCO namely, Dr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General, Mr Trevino Ricardo Chapa, Deputy Secretary General and Mr Hans Pieters, Head of Administration and Personnel. Other distinguished personalities were also present namely, Mr Batsirai Chadzingwa, Vice Chair, WCO ESA region, Mr Lary Lizza, Director, Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROBC), Messrs M. Bheekhee and V. Pareatumbee of the MRA Board, Mr S.Lal, Director General of the MRA and Observers from the African Union Commission, COMESA, SADC and IMF Afritac South.

The Governing Council Meeting has a broad objective of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of ESA Customs administrations in revenue collection, facilitation of international trade, safeguarding

national security, protecting society and the environment, and compiling international trade statistics. To achieve these objectives, it is very important that the ESA Customs administrations modernize and automate their procedures, processes and systems and also implement WCO's international standards, recommendations, tools and instruments in support of Members' national customs legislation and practices. This meeting has the wisdom and mandate to take key decisions in these areas for the benefit of individual member administrations as well for the benefit of the whole ESA region.

There were many important issues on the agenda of the meeting, among which, the New Regional Strategy for the period 2022-2025 was discussed. The meeting also deliberated on decisions of the 35th Regional Steering Group Meeting as well as the ESA Risk Management Compendium and Gender Equity, Equality and Diversity issues amongst others.

In his keynote address, during the opening ceremony, Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy stressed on the important role played by Customs in the economy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it operated 24/7 like other emergency services to ensure supply chain and business continuity. "We are providing unwavering support to the MRA to acquire the latest tools, equipment and technology, to further enhance the operational capabilities of Customs officers and to better fight against the trafficking of illicit drugs and narcotics", he added. The Honourable Minister acknowledged the support that the government provides to boost trade and investment, by implementing a variety of measures such as the National Electronic Licensing System, a single electronic platform for business licensing and the Mauritius Trade Easy portal, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

Dr Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General of the WCO, in his opening address thanked the government of Mauritius for the level of cooperation with other customs administration in the WCO ESA region. He congratulated Mauritius for having WCO Accredited Experts in various fields, who assist WCO in its capacity building programme in the African region. He highlighted the main discussions he had with the Honourable P.K. Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius during his courtesy visit in his office on 11 May 2022 concerning; the reinforcement of compliance functions, capacity building in innovative technologies, the fight against undervaluation of goods and preventing leakage of government revenue, commercial fraud and narcotics, Intelligence and Risk Management and optimisation of revenue

collection on excisable goods by adopting international best practices on control over locally manufactured excisable goods, amongst others.

Mr Batsirai Chadzingwa, Vice Chair, WCO ESA region, in his address thanked Mauritius for hosting the GC meeting at a short notice and the dedication of Mauritius of its commitment in the region. “I assure you of our devotion as Customs Administrations in the region to the full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). To support these efforts, the region has developed a new Regional Strategy seeking to ensure economic growth and intra-regional trade by facilitating trade securely, efficiently and professionally. We also aim to further develop gender inclusive, professional and modernised customs administration that are fair, efficient and effective in revenue collection and border management service”, he added.

In his address, Mr. Lal, Director General of the MRA acknowledged the keen interest of the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, in the development and facilitation of trade. Mr Lal stated that, as the centre of Excellence for Compliance and Enforcement, the WCO Mauritius Multilingual Regional Training Centre (RTC) is playing a crucial role in capacity building activities not only for Customs but also for other border enforcement agencies in Mauritius as well as for the ESA region. “The RTC Mauritius has been actively organizing training programmes, locally and regionally, and include areas such as Harmonized Systems (HS), Customs Valuation, Rules of Origin, combatting illicit drugs and narcotics, Anti-Money Laundering, Counterfeit Currency and Terrorist Financing, enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights, Brand Identification of medicine and medical devices, identification of New Psycho Active Substances and Profiling Techniques, amongst others”, he added.

The Governing Council meeting culminated on 13 May 2022, with the award to the winner of the WCO ESA ‘SOTHO’ contest, which, in fact is a photo contest involving member countries of the ESA region.