



STATEMENT BY OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SACU

Ms. PAULINA M. ELAGO

(Read by Ngoanamokgotho Tladi, Deputy Director Trade Facilitation)

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS DAY AT
THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVENUE SERVICE**

26 JANUARY 2021

The Commissioner of the South African Revenue Service, Professor Edward Kieswetter

The Chairperson of the SACU Commission, Ambassador Xavier Carrim

The Acting Commissioner of the South African Border Management Agency,
Mr. Gene Ravele

The SARS Leadership and the Leadership from the respective government
Departments and Agencies of Government

Members of the Private Sector

All invited Guests

All protocol observed

Good Morning!

1. On behalf of the SACU Secretariat and my Executive Secretary, Ms. Paulina Elago, who could not join today due to other competing commitments, allow me at the onset, to thank, the Commissioner of SARS, Professor Edward Kieswetter for inviting us to participate at this important event to celebrate the International Customs Day, under the theme “Customs bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a sustainable supply chain”. The theme is befitting of the current challenges facing commerce and trade globally.
2. Notwithstanding the challenges and limitations that have arisen as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, I am pleased that SARS and its stakeholders are still able to celebrate this day virtually. In this respect, I wish to congratulate SARS for the agility and ability to take advantage of and maximise the use of technology to host this important event today. It is a clear indication that the world of work has changed, causing us all to adapt to the new reality.
3. I also wish to congratulate South Africa on the establishment of the Border Management Agency, as a region, we look forward to drawing insights from the work of the Agency in our Trade Facilitation Programme.
4. Let me also express my sincere gratitude to the World Customs Organisation for their continued support and dedication in serving the Customs Community across the world with distinction. The role played by Customs Administrations as frontline personnel across the globe has never been so important in our lifetime and could not be overemphasised.
5. I am also saddened to learn of the passing of Mr. Hippias Kuzinzwa, the Commissioner of Customs in Zimbabwe and I send our sincere condolences to the Zimbabwean Revenue Authority. His passing is a great loss to the Customs fraternity in the Southern African region and across the globe.

6. In the midst of the global pandemic, international trade and cross border movement of supplies including that of critical and essential products has had to flow and be facilitated by all relevant agencies especially the Customs authorities. It is therefore pleasing to note that the Customs community across the globe dedicate efforts to recognise and celebrate their impeccable work and achievements on this day. A much-needed morale booster for Customs Officials to continue their administration and management of international trade globally during these challenging times.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. This event is taking place at a time when the COVID-19 Pandemic continues to threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people around the world. The Pandemic has continued to disrupt global activities across all the economic sectors and industries.
8. Governments across the globe continued to implement lockdown and border closure measures in a bid to contain the Pandemic. This has resulted in logistical constraints, slowed business and trade activities, and a resultant reduction in the movement of cross border trade and people, and in some cases halted production.

9. The SACU region has also witnessed disruptions in the supply chain. Despite these disruptions, SACU has ensured that essential goods continue to move across borders and the efforts from the Heads of Customs are highly appreciated. I am pleased to note that the initiatives implemented under the Regional Customs Modernisation programme assisted the SACU Customs Administrations to exchange information with ease and to remain resilient. In addition, Customs Administrations in SACU were able to adapt quickly to adopt measures that assisted to limit human intervention in order to curb the spread of the COVID-19-Pandemic for both traders and Customs Officials.
10. The key initiatives implemented under this Regional Customs Modernisation Programme are on IT Connectivity; Risk Management, Compliance and Enforcement; Preferred Trader Programme which is currently migrated to the Authorised Economic Operator Compliance Programme and Stakeholders Engagement; Customs Legislative Framework; Gender Mainstreaming and Capacity Building; as well as Monitoring and Evaluation. IT Connectivity and the Authorised Economic Operator Programme are the core pillars of the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme, whilst others are support functions.
11. The Pandemic has also caused disruptions to the global supply chains resulting in delays and in some cases shortages of products. On the other hand, we have also witnessed a shift from the global production centres to more localised production centres for some of the essential products such as masks, and sanitisers. Although there are positive signs and spin-offs on the local productions, a resilient global supply chain is still critical for global economic recovery. This is mainly due to the inter-connected and logistics linkages of the demand and supply globally.

12. In our sub-region, we have three landlocked countries that rely on transit trade for their livelihoods. Therefore, a resilient supply chain is critical to ensure timely supply of essential goods and to ensure a smooth flow of goods across the borders. I am glad to note that in SACU, Customs Administrations and all government agencies recognized early on the importance of a regionally coordinated approach in order to expediate the clearance of essential goods and generally facilitate the movement of goods across our borders.
13. Common measures to facilitate trade during the COVID-19 Pandemic were approved by the SACU Council of Ministers. In addition, SACU Member States coordinated a list of essential goods that needed to be facilitated across the region. The Heads of Customs and Customs Experts created platforms to share notes and align their processes and procedure required to facilitate trade including bilateral exchange of information to facilitate trade. The platform was also useful in the timely dissemination and, sharing of information as well as the critical changes that would affect operating hours at the border posts.
14. I would also like to thank SARS for the continued contribution and support provided to the SACU sub-region in the different aspects of the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. As a region, we have noted that some traders still attempt to circumvent the customs and trade requirements through importation of substandard products, including fake medication. This is quiet concerning especially when the world is faced with a pandemic of this magnitude. It calls for the need to strengthen our risk-based approach and efforts to mitigate such opportunistic behaviour.

16. In this regard, the ongoing work in SACU to establish an Authorised Economic Operator Programme and IT Connectivity under the Customs Modernisation Programme is timely and a step in the right direction. The Authorised Economic Operator Programme aims to secure the supply chains and ensure compliance with the laws and regulations.
17. Some of the initiatives of the Customs Modernisation Programme that continue to benefit Member States include the SACU Regional Customs Risk Management Strategy. The strategy greatly enhanced regional efforts to curb opportunistic circulation of illicit and high-risk goods in the region. SACU Member States also continue to invest in robust and modernised risk-based Customs Management Systems that enabled virtual inspections of cargo to protect the health of Customs Officials and traders.
18. Some of the lessons of the COVID-19 Pandemic for our region include:
 - operational continuity - Customs Administrations were able to continue operations and to render the essential services to facilitate trade. This has revealed the importance of developing disaster management strategies and business continuity plans to be able to continue operations even during disasters;
 - regional coordination and information sharing - the Pandemic proved the importance of close coordination and knowledge and information sharing within the sub-region to expedite the movement of essential goods. This is as a result to the interdependencies on the intra-SACU trade amongst our Member States.
 - The importance of IT Connectivity - all SACU Customs Administrations have enabled their Customs Management Systems to interconnect and there is need to speed up full implementation of automated exchange of customs data to improve the integrity of the information shared across our sub-region.

- learning new ways of work to future proof any disasters and pandemics - SACU Customs and Revenue Authorities have had to adopt modern approaches to facilitate trade as well as a hybrid approach that includes working in a physical and virtual environment. This taught us to remain agile and consistently adopt and implement new technologies to facilitate trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. The SACU Council of Ministers approved Trade Facilitation and logistics as one of our priority Programme in SACU. This therefore provides an opportunity for SACU Member States to develop an all-encompassing and integrated Trade Facilitation Programme that also addresses key impediments to cross border trade and logistics as well as challenges facing businesses engaged in cross border movement of goods. We look forward to harnessing the expertise from SARS and South Africa in developing an integrated Trade Facilitation Programme for the region.
20. In conclusion, the region is in the middle of the second wave of the pandemic and thus calling for us all to remain vigilant, and to adopt strategies that ensures operational continuity and resilience as we continue to facilitate trade and secure the SACU supply chain. As frontline workers we also extend our thanks and appreciation to Customs Officials and border agencies who remain at the fore front of ensuring that trade continues, and goods and services facilitated even in the midst of the pandemic.

I wish you a happy International Customs Day!!

Thank you for your kind attention!!!!