

IAN SAUNDERS



DEAR CUSTOMS LEADERS,

Last month, I was pleased to present my candidacy personally and to share some of the thoughts and ideas I have heard from colleagues over the past several months. I also presented you with the four pillars of my platform – *protect, deliver, evolve, and engage* – which capture the functions I will work to have the WCO enhance through its service to members. This is an agenda I trust to be guided by you, the leaders of the global Customs community, because our collective success depends on how empowered each of you are at the national level and the degree by which the WCO is directed to best serve your critical mission.

The next four editions of this newsletter will offer a deeper perspective on each of the four pillars. For this March edition, I am sharing my views on what it means to *protect*.

In this, and in every other theme I promote, if privileged to serve as Secretary General, I hope to have my views and suggestions informed and enriched by members. I will continue to listen to and reflect on your priorities, the work already being done by the WCO, and areas of need that remain.

It is a pivotal time for the customs community to take action...



PLEASE SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK WITH ME!

As always, I would be pleased to receive any feedback you wish to offer. I can be reached at IanSaundersWCO@trade.gov, or you can contact CBP Senior Advisor Christina Bell at Christina.A.Bell@cbp.dhs.gov.

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CUSTOMS AS CRITICAL PROTECTORS OF SOCIETY



FOR CENTURIES...

Customs has been a crucial driver in enabling economic growth and development through its foundational role as collector of duties and taxes. This role has enabled national spending programs to better *protect* and grow societies under government care. Revenue generation represents a core responsibility for all Customs administrations around the world, though its level of emphasis in modern times and circumstances can vary. I am mindful that, in the history of my own country, Customs generated the revenue that enabled a young United States to settle its debts following independence, to grow its territory, and to become an active member of international community.

WHAT I'VE BEEN HEARING...

from members across the world is the critical importance of effective revenue collection by Customs administrations. Protecting the revenue is essential in making available the governmental resources that enable a wide range of state services and create an environment where societies and economies can grow. The ability of members to support this traditional definition of protection is one we must continue to ensure, through attention to the trade disciplines (e.g., classification, valuation, origin) and ensuring that tools and support in this space respond to members' current needs.

NOT SURPRISINGLY...

while I have heard that Customs must enable protection through revenue collection, those efforts are vested equally with responsibility for protecting through enforcement activities. Such is the challenge all administrations face, particularly in a more complex international environment. This second dimension of our charge to *protect* came into sharp focus for me during the Fragile Borders Conference in Abuja, Nigeria. Many customs administrations find themselves contending with conflict-affected borders due to domestic unrest, transnational terrorists and organized criminal groups, or international disputes. The discussions in Abuja were a clear reminder of the high stakes associated with border management as well as the risks that Customs officers face when discharging their duties in extraordinary and dangerous circumstances. I commend the WCO for the initiative that culminated in the Fragile Borders conference, and I look forward to building upon foundations such as these. In addition, I will be interested in working with the Secretariat and members to make sure existing enforcement-related guidance and offerings address these needs.

IT IS A PIVOTAL TIME FOR THE CUSTOMS COMMUNITY TO TAKE ACTION;
I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING YOUR IDEAS.



EVERY DAY...

Customs must execute revenue collection and enforcement functions in environments around the world that have two things in common: growing complexity and emergent challenges.

We encounter an array of threats – from innovative methods of duty evasion, sophisticated cross-border criminality, high volumes of trade, rapidly changing technology, and many others – with an expectation from our people that these will be handled in ways that keep us safe, secure, and prosperous. Answering the call requires us to be vigilant, judicious, and resilient. The collective experience of members that the WCO harnesses is a powerful resource both to help as well as to identify areas where we need to focus to create even greater effectiveness and impact.



A KEY FOCUS OF THE WCO...

must therefore nurture the dialogue around topics and activities that will support members in their mission to *protect* society. This must include ways to balance the evolving role of Customs to incorporate more of the enforcement threat mitigation profile while remaining clear about the significance of revenue collection. My experience is that the two lines of effort are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be performed simultaneously in a mutually supportive way, especially when Customs approaches these tasks with the support of the WCO.

Moreover, I would like to challenge WCO members to reflect on their needs in this regard and to help the WCO maintain a clear course that will contribute to members' ability to *protect*. I applaud the WCO's successes in this space and look forward to achieving more, together.

IN CLOSING...

As I reflect on all the work that is required for effective protection, I recognize that members have unique perspectives on which aspects are most important. If honored to become Secretary General, my charge would be to serve and listen to members to enable the effective development and deployment of resources that support and enable the protection of revenue and our societies. I encourage members to consider your achievements and challenges in the theme of *protect*, and how or whether WCO tools and instruments have enabled progress in this area.

What I have heard from members in this regard leads me to the next pillar of my platform: delivering results. Next month, I plan to share with you my thoughts around *deliver* – and how the organization's delivery of services is (and must be) directly linked to our respective missions to *protect*. Until then, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ian Saunders