



# IAN SAUNDERS

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## TRANSCRIPT

### 45TH CONFERENCE OF THE CARIBBEAN CUSTOMS LAW ENFORCEMENT COUNCIL

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Good morning, distinguished heads of customs, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be here with you during this opening of your annual Conference, and to be able to see a number of familiar faces.

I thank the CCLEC Secretariat and leadership for inviting me to take part in your meeting, and the Cayman Islands for being such gracious hosts. It's good to see that CCLEC continues as an active organization, offering services and a strategic focus for customs administrations in the region.

This convening is a reminder of the persistent challenges that face us as we seek to protect our countries and facilitate the movement of legitimate trade. It's also a reminder of the strong connections within the customs community that are needed to enable robust responses supportive of both these objectives.

I am here among you in a different capacity than in years past. Many of you may know that I have been selected by the United States to stand as its candidate for the post of Secretary General of the World Customs Organization.

I accepted this honor grounded in respect for the WCO's past successes, a recognition that there is much to do in the present, and a sober realization that we will need to face new challenges as we move forward together.

And when I say "together," I don't just mean the member customs administrations of the WCO. I am referring to the wider customs community – including companies, organizations, and customs administrations that are not among the WCO's membership – like some that make up the CCLEC.

I believe that the work before us to ensure continued public safety and economic growth will call upon the best in all of us, and will demand from us greater creativity and more expansive thinking to position us well relative to the many and real challenges we face.

This work will also require that we take full advantage of the network of like-minded partners with capacity, expertise, and interest in ensuring that the benefits of international trade are realized through customs efficiency, while protecting our countries from the risks that can exist within cross-border activities through customs effectiveness.

As part of my effort to seek the post of Secretary General, I've undertaken an active listening campaign with members – to understand their concerns and priorities, and to get a sense of how the WCO supports their efforts.

I've sought this feedback based on a vision that is focused on leading the organization to provide high-quality, responsive services to its members by drawing on its rich past, optimizing present efforts, and driving Customs toward a safe, prosperous, and inclusive future. My goal is to lead the WCO in a manner that enables it to help customs administrations worldwide.

Based on what I've heard from various heads of Customs, I've identified four core concepts that I believe capture the essence of what our efforts must be to achieve this vision.

These four focus areas are: Helping Customs to protect, helping Customs to deliver, helping Customs to evolve, and helping Customs to engage.

These concepts don't represent a specific policy prescription as much as they comprise a framework for assessing the activities of the WCO – both existing programs and prospective ones -- as the organization seeks to support improved and more effective practice among its members.

And while it is my hope that these concepts will resonate with WCO members, I am mindful that the larger community of stakeholders are also agents of change.

With that in mind, I would like to offer an explanation of these four themes, with attention to the value of customs cooperation to partners outside of the formal WCO community.

So, turning to the first theme – helping Customs to protect – I begin with an acknowledgement that protection has different meanings depending on where you are. And what Customs is expected to do to protect society also varies.

I remind myself in the context of the Caribbean region that customs administrations have the collection of revenue as a principal mission. Performing this task well ensures that government resources are available to serve, support, develop, and safeguard our communities.

Yet I also remind myself that this region is no stranger to the security imperative that also attaches to Customs. The challenges of narcotics trafficking, transnational organized crime, firearms, and others security issues are not unfamiliar. Neither are their negative side effects on societies.

Of course, where these ills enter via the border, Customs is expected and called upon to act. It must do so while discerning between the traffic that is detrimental and that which constitutes the life blood of the economy and the foundation of our way of life.

Customs must also do this work in an environment marked by high public expectations, increased speed of trade and travel, greater complexity of threats, and constrained resources to deal with it all.

This juxtaposition of complex demands and constrained resources brings me to my second theme: Helping Customs deliver.

By “deliver”, I mean effective implementation. I mean translating standards, guidelines, and recommendations into regular practice.

The WCO has developed rules, instruments, and tools that address the broad span of member needs. More than that, its certified experts who work directly with customs administrations to deliver the tools and training are crucial enablers of the WCO's mission.

Implementation support – through experts sharing their knowledge, through capacity building, mentorship, and through deliberate and strategic communication – is critical if we want the ideals espoused in the WCO (and for that matter, CCLEC) to become the state of customs practice.

One area of particular interest to me that intersects with the CCLEC community is the work undertaken by the WCO and in cooperation with the UN on Small Island Economies (SIEs).

At the end of 2020, the WCO issued guidance for customs administrations on SIEs, tailored to their unique challenges with recommendations that aim to assist in global supply chain integration with risk management, trade facilitation, security, and revenue collection.

I applaud the initiative and am encouraged by the commitment it represents to address the needs of all members. But I'm more interested in its practical impact. I very much want to hear from you, both inside and outside of the WCO, about the uptake of this guidance, about what is working, what might require re-tooling, about its applicability during the extraordinary time of its issuance, and how you are measuring success.

Another topic the WCO has taken up is the development of Guidelines on Disaster Management and Supply Chain Continuity, which seek to help administrations to recover from significant disruptions, such as those created by natural disasters. In a region that faces the challenge of extreme seasonal weather events, guidance on how to continue critical customs operations is, unfortunately, a needed addition to the collective toolbox.

In any context – normal operations or otherwise -- it is service delivery, and measurement of its success, that truly enable responsiveness to the needs of the global customs, trade, and law enforcement communities.

And this is why implementation support is critical in my view. It helps bridge the gap between aspiration and execution, especially when resources are constrained. We need to ensure that what we have is directed as best it can toward achieving the objectives of a more responsive and agile Customs, and administrations that help realize the potential created by international trade while countering its associated risks.

This idea of agility in customs leads me to my third theme: Helping Customs evolve.

International trade is not static. The complexity of supply chains, the volumes of trade, the diversity and sophistication of merchandise, the expectations of speedy delivery, and the risks associated with any disruption of the system have combined to create a set of conditions that challenge every one of our administrations.

The consequences of not being able to adapt are, for many, a fresh memory, as we think about the COVID-19 pandemic — when the inability of supply chains and sometimes of customs to adjust to unexpected changes led to shortages and other challenges for our people.

We've also all experienced an acceleration of change in trading patterns, including an explosive growth in e-commerce as well as efforts to examine the configuration of global supply chains to avoid vulnerabilities deriving from highly concentrated production of some products.

We are fortunate that Customs has been able to adapt to these changes – even if through emergency measures. Goals that have been on our collective agenda for some time – like digitalization and automated risk management – made forward strides, although the work of institutionalizing and refining such advances remains.

The lessons of the pandemic are acute, but only part of the drive to evolve that Customs faces. Modernization is not just a function of technology; it relates to the review of procedures to ensure that we find efficiencies, some of which are enabled by technology.

Evolving and modernizing includes considering how to make the best use of information we have, as well as the ability of our enabling infrastructure to support the work that we have to do – be it to accommodate increasing trade volumes or to improve operational resilience in the context of increasingly powerful storms.

Evolving is about ensuring our agencies are healthy enough to deal with the pace of change — not just shocks, but the natural course of change that we will continue to experience.

Evolving is about ensuring our workforce is skilled and adaptable, well-trained and motivated.

It is about identifying and harnessing the full range of talent available, ensuring our organizations are diverse enough to bring the broadest spectrum of complex problem solving that is needed to confront the adversaries that seek to circumvent the rules.

Evolving also requires that our organizations have mechanisms that enable us to identify innovations and incorporate them into our mainstream ways of doing business.

These are tall orders, even for the most motivated and well-resourced agencies.

I would argue that the challenges that we face are bigger than any one of us, no matter which country we're from. So, while we must evolve and ensure that all of the resources at our disposal are optimally directed to keep us ahead of our adversaries and in synch with legitimate traders, Customs cannot be successful if it sees itself as taking on this burden alone.

Thus, evolving entails including in our conversations those that may be outside of customs but impacted by our work. With this final thought, I turn to the fourth and last pillar of my candidacy: Helping Customs engage.

Given the challenges ahead of us, Customs must move beyond its customary way of doing business to include nontraditional contributors or solutions.

The WCO and the members it serves need access to the views, expertise, and experiences of all groups that touch customs and trade as the WCO guides its members toward day-to-day success in managing international trade.

My personal experience serving in the United States government is that institutionalized mechanisms to engage with interested stakeholders have yielded better compliance with rules and processes that achieve stated policy goals with less onerous compliance burdens borne by businesses.

Both we and the trade have a diverse set of concerns and needs. Building mutual understanding through structured dialogue is one way we have been able to ease unintentional burdens associated with trading and ensure the customs imperatives are satisfied.

Also, the trade community possesses a great deal of expertise built through its experience working in various markets. It creates the potential for the private sector to work with us to identify procedures that are mutually beneficial.

But engagement goes beyond the trade community, it also means maturing partnerships within our own governments. This is essential, but not exclusive collaboration. It is recognized in the WCO concept of coordinated border management.

It's also recognized clearly by this group. In its very name, CCLEC highlights the nexus between customs and law enforcement more generally. It's a recognition that speaks to the ongoing need to cultivate stronger relationships across the interagency to protect society – using the combination of customs presence and experience and the expertise and authorities of other agencies to stop transborder criminality whenever and however possible.

Interagency cooperation is one line of engagement that must continue.

Also worthy of our engagement are non-governmental institutions, such as those that focus on trafficking in wildlife or exotic flora or on climate change or broader environmental protection. Their knowledge and reach can enrich our approach to executing the mission of Customs in a manner consistent with international obligations and the values of our people.

Ultimately, I believe that maturing relationships with those both within and external to our governments, as well as engaging in new partnerships, can enable customs administrations to protect, to deliver, and to evolve.

If given the privilege to serve the WCO as Secretary General, I will be eager to ensure the best input and resources are available to inspire, guide, and support the WCO's actions amid our current and future challenges. And, as a friend of CCLEC, I hope this will make a real-world difference to you.

In this context, I am reminded of the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between the WCO and CCLEC – a document that linked the two organizations premised on the belief that, by sharing information and working together, we could magnify our impact for the betterment of customs globally.

We are approaching the 20th anniversary of that MOU's signing. It's a milestone that gives us an opportunity to identify and reflect on past successes and to ensure that benefits from the relationship between CCLEC and the WCO continue to accrue.

If I am elected Secretary General, I will be interested in understanding the impact your relationship with the WCO has had and ensuring that the shared goals and motivation that brought us together then is leading us to constructive interactions now.

I will also want to know how we can improve and strengthen our working together — because the call to protect, deliver, evolve, and engage isn't one that solely rests in the WCO. It's the call to duty for all of us in the customs community, the call each of you answers every day.

It's in the spirit of shared commitment and shared responsibility that I stand before you. I wish you continued success and hope very much to have the opportunity to work with you again.



**IAN SAUNDERS**  
**U.S. CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY GENERAL**  
**OF THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION**