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**United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
(UN-ESCWA)**

**Regional Workshop on
"Trade Facilitation through the Application of the Single Window"**

Cairo, Egypt :11-12 July, 2007

Information Note

1. Introduction

With the increasing integration of economies around the world, facilitating the smooth flow of trade information has become a pressing requirement for governments and businesses. To cope, governments and regional groupings alike endeavour to make use of the applications made available by the enormous development of communications and information technologies in the daily business of their respective government administrations. Thus, governments have become more inclined to adopt the concept and applications of the "e-government," which facilitates handling of individuals and businesses formalities in the most efficient manner, reducing time and cutting costs. These applications have extended to the realms of trade regulation at customs authorities and other relevant national administrative entities in order to facilitate importation and exportation and work as a catalyst to increase involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in international trade.

The import-export processes require a great deal of information and data exchange among the parties involved in these processes, including customs authorities and agencies of relevance, the private sector or those that represent them, such as shipping companies and customs clearance agents, as well as banks, insurance companies and so forth. Studies have shown that trade obstacles are usually found in the excessive amount of day-to-day routine procedures, multiplicity of relevant

government agencies, excessive documentation requirements and signatures. These tend to drain trading companies due to the increase in financial costs they have to bear arising from meeting these requirements, in addition to unnecessary delays in releasing the imported and exported goods. Hence, to reduce this negative effect, many international organizations and national governments have set up programs and mechanisms to facilitate trade, be it through developing automated customs procedures, connecting offices at border crossings, simplifying procedures, setting standards for required documentation and exchange of information, that have had a high impact on facilitating trade procedures and processes.

The noticeable leap in trade facilitation is manifested through the emergence of the “Single Window” concept on both regional and national levels, followed suit by the concept of “Paperless Trade.” The “Single Window” aims to expedite and simplify information flows between traders and governments and bring meaningful gains to all parties involved in cross-border trade. It is a system that allows relevant stakeholders in trade to submit required information to a single body to fulfil all import/export-related regulatory requirements, leading to the release of goods. The procedure is managed internally with other government authorities, which significantly increases the speed at which goods can move, reduces costs and improves business efficiency. This in turn benefits both governments and businesses by facilitating and promoting international trade and improving export competitiveness. Despite the wide variety of services and facilities, which the Single Window can offer, depending on its design and coverage, either physical or electronic, it proved so far to have a positive impact on trade facilitation, which is enhanced progressively with the increase of applications of the electronic information exchange.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the two-day Regional Workshop are to present the trends and developments in trade facilitation to-date, especially in the application and implementation of relevant international recommendations concerning the Single Window concept. The Workshop will also look at the efforts of international organizations in developing and applying the concept, especially the technical and legal requirements to establish the Single Window. Coordination requirements among government entities and stake holders will also be discussed, in addition to being introduced to the main factors for successful implementations of the Single Window, the services offered and the role of customs authorities in this realm. The Regional Workshop will endeavor to address the important role of the Single Window in facilitating trade through presentations on best practices of a number of national and regional case studies from East and Southeast Asia and the Arab region that have successfully implemented the Single Window. This Regional Workshop on “Trade Facilitation through the Application of the Single Window” will also be an opportunity for customs officials, in the Arab region in particular, to evaluate and reflect on their respective governments’ processes in developing their customs-related agenda that simplifies and facilitates trade procedures, while comparing it to that of other regions and the rest of the world,

and to lay down a set of recommendations on the implementation of a Single Window in their respective country and/or region.

3. Date and Venue

The Regional Workshop will be take place on 11-12 July 2007 in Cairo, Republic of Egypt.

It will be held at the “Grand Tiba Rose Hotel (Airforce Defense Club)” in Cairo. ESCWA has managed a preferential rate of 80\$ (U.S.) per night for a single or double room. Breakfast is included. A 12% service charge will be added. All participants should contact the hotel directly for reservations at their earliest convenience.

Grand Tiba Rose Hotel
Al-Nozha Street- Golfland,
Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt
Tel: +20-2-906149 or +20-2-906905
Fax: +20-2-909142

All participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation expenses.

4. Visa Requirements for Entry into Egypt

All participants must issue a visa from the nearest Embassy of the Republic of Egypt in their respective country of residence well in advance.

5. Organization

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

6. Participants

Representatives and government officials of customs authorities, Ministries of Finance and Trade and Standardization and Surveillance Offices from the Arab region are expected to participate. In addition, representatives from the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, and representatives and experts from customs authorities from other regions will participate.

Other United Nations Regional Commissions, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Customs Organization (WCO), Korean International Trade Association, and Axway International will be invited to participate.

7. Language

The Workshop will be held in English and Arabic with simultaneous interpretation.

8. Additional Information

Any inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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Working papers or presentations in any of the sessions by representatives of customs offices are welcome. Those who wish to make a presentation, under the approval of ESCWA, should submit their working papers no later than 30 June 2007, in order to make the necessary preparations and ensure the efficient organization of the Workshop.