

YEAR 2007 COMPTROLLER-GENERAL

OF CUSTOMS

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE

CLOSING CEREMONY

BY

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THEME: “TOWARDS ATTAINING 48-HOUR CLEARING TIME”

Protocol

I am indeed pleased to present this address after what I believe has been yet another successful Conference. I have also no doubt in my mind that all of us who attended the various sessions of the Conference and participated either as listeners or as resource persons must have learnt something new and added to our wealth of knowledge. May I therefore express my profound gratitude to our resource persons and all conference participants for your honest and valuable contributions during the various sessions. Having said that, permit me, however, to make some few remarks before the closure of this Conference.

2. REVENUE COLLECTION

While appreciating the fact that there may have indeed been some constraints impeding against maximum revenue collection, I wish to state here that in the final analysis, revenue performance, being one of our statutory primary duties, would partly be the basis upon which the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service would be measured. We commend all who have positively contributed to our collection efforts so far. All hands must therefore be on deck to ensure that we not only meet our revenue target, but surpass it by ensuring we collect all collectable revenue. We have commended all Area Commands that have achieved their revenue targets and urge they continue to improve accordingly but ensuring all areas of revenue leakages are effectively blocked. This we can achieve while facilitating legitimate trade.

2.1. RISK ASSESSMENT REPORTS (RARs)

You will all agree with me that Risk Assessment Report (RAR) is a major component of our clearing system and therefore should be treated with

all seriousness it deserves. It is therefore surprising to note that this very important report which should be transmitted electronically unto our system by the service providers promptly even before SGDs are lodged by Importers/Agents are not received in our system with the required despatch while some remain unutilized in our system for over several months. This certainly can not continue if we are to take maximum advantage of our automation system to achieve the desired goal of 48-hour clearing time. To this end, I wish to therefore direct that all Area Commands generate a list of all unutilized RARs along with the list of Uncleared Cargo and send copies to Headquarters and to the Zonal Post Clearance Audit Unit. The concessioners are also here directed to send to the Customs Area Controller and Headquarters Uncleared Cargo List in their respective terminals.

2.2. POST CLEARANCE AUDIT UNIT

This Unit which was created to eliminate delays in the clearing procedure while at the same time ensuring the Service collects all collectable revenue on imports will be strengthened for optimal performance in our bid to actualize the 48-hour clearing of cargo in our ports and border stations.

3. ANTI-SMUGGLING OPERATIONS

Our reinvigorated anti-smuggling operations have so far been very encouraging. I wish to urge you to do better. All Area Controllers must therefore be very alive to their responsibilities. They must tighten security and significantly improve the tempo of suppression of smuggling operations in their various Commands. We must appreciate that a successful anti-smuggling campaign ensures canalisation of legitimate trade and thus improved revenue just as effective trade facilitation also reduces the urge to smuggle. All Area Controllers, especially those at the Border Stations, must

henceforth ensure strict compliance with International Transit norms which stipulates that **“Transit goods must be handed over to the Customs of the country of destination in their original packing form”**.

4. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

We have noted with concern that Circulars issued from Headquarters meant to clarify thorny issues and guide officers accordingly are not disseminated to officers at Area Command and Zonal levels accordingly. The direct result of this is rumour mongering among officers, ignorance on the job especially on issues that impact directly on their performance. Within the year, attendance of Management meetings was extended to Zonal Coordinators. I am to re-iterate the objective is not for them to keep decisions taken at such meetings to do with officers and men of the Service to themselves but to disseminate them to Area Controllers under them who will in turn pass such to officers and men in their various Commands. You will recall that during my recent working tour to Lagos Areas, I had cause to sanction some officers and men on issues to do with not complying with headquarters directives. Zonal Coordinators, Area Controllers and Heads of Units must therefore ensure that Circulars that are meant for education and information of officers and men serving under them are brought to their notice promptly as lapses shall henceforth be visited with strict sanctions.

5. SERVICE PROVIDERS

I am sure that our service providers, who have been privileged to participate fully in this year's conference would have observed that the determination of the Service to pursue with vigour the agenda of government aimed at facilitation of genuine trade through 48-hour clearing of cargo is irreversible and thus require they play the game according to the rules by

strictly fulfilling their part of the contract agreement. While we appreciate the fact that some of them are making genuine efforts , we want to appeal to those lagging behind to be more determined as the Service cannot afford to be seen to be an impediment in the country's desire for economic development.

6. CAPACITY BUILDING

As mentioned in my opening address, the need for capacity building through training and re-training especially in the area Information Communication Technology (ICT) cannot be over emphasized and better appreciated than now if we must remain relevant in the scheme of things globally. We appreciate the fact that Customs Administration the world over have migrated from manual system to the use of ICT. In fact our attainment of 48-hours clearing time is dependent on how ICT compliant we are. To this end, capacity building through training and retraining of officers and men of the Service shall henceforth be pursued with vigour to further equip them for the challenges ahead. Our Training Colleges in Ikeja and Kano have been refurbished and equipped for that purpose. In addition to this, may I stress that for any personnel to be relevant in the Services and by extension remain, there is no other time for such an officer to constantly keep him or herself updated especially as relates to ICT than now. We appreciate the cooperation we have received from Messrs Webb-Fontain in the refurbishing and equipping the Training Colleges.

6.1. CUSTOMS LICENCED CLEARING AGENTS

Since Customs Licenced Clearing Agents are essential integral part of the clearing system and by extension a major stakeholder in the maritime sector, attainment of 48-hour clearing time depend to a large extent on how

effective and efficient they are in the discharge of the duties. To this end, the management of the Service, in realization of the need for them to be ICT compliant, has organised series of courses for them. These courses, aimed at professionalizing the industry and weeding away touting, shall start early next year. Also they shall be encouraged to take the advantages of Direct Traders Input (DTI) facility of Asycuda to develop and equip their offices and therefore pass their SGD forms from the comfort of their various offices thereby reducing personal contacts with officers and men of the Service.

7. ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

Perhaps the major factor militating against our optimal performance, which has been identified at this Conference, is our attitude to work. This problem which is directly related to indiscipline and corruption is an issue that affects all of us - the stakeholders. But permit me to remind us here that adherence to proper procedure in the conduct of our business, application of due process and a steadfast commitment to the virtues of integrity, diligence and hard work are the gateway to the success of any endeavour. These we should all strive to imbibe. However the Service, being a discipline organisation, has an internal mechanism of dealing with indiscipline. This we will continue to use until our officers and men are forced to do things the proper way. I will therefore employ all our stakeholders to tackle this problem with all the seriousness it deserves. Thus with positive change of attitude from all of us and compliance with the rules, attainment of 48-hour clearing time shall be a reality with all its attendant benefits to the economy of our great country.

8. WAY FORWARD

We are not unmindful of the fact that attainment of 48 hour clearing

time and by extension facilitation of genuine trade is not without some constraints/problems some of which have been identified, nevertheless it is our belief that these problems can be effectively tackled and addressed if all of us i.e. stakeholders are sincere enough to play our roles effectively. All we need to do is adopt due process and best practices in our transactions. HONESTY, I dare say is the key word here. We have to be honest if we truly intend to make a change. On our part, we will continue to make ourselves available for consultations and fine tuning of procedures aimed at achieving set goals.

9. CONCLUSION

The only way we can sufficiently justify our attendance at this Conference is by collectively expressing values in our performances that reflect the positive lessons of the Seminar. We have talked enough. We must now, not only act, but live it. We must therefore go back to our various Commands and sensitize our officers and men on this noble course. We expect the same from all other stakeholders.

9.1. Finally, may I on behalf of the Officers and Men of the Service thank sincerely His Excellency, Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua GCFR, the President, Commander-In-Chief of Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for his support and kind approval for this Conference. The Honourable Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Nigeria Customs Service Board, Dr. Shamsudeen Usman has been working tirelessly to ensure a better and improved service delivery by Nigeria Customs Service. Sir, we say we are indeed very grateful. Our gratitude also goes to the National Assembly who, have been consistent in their support for the Service. The Organised Private Sector and various stakeholders who partner with the Nigeria Customs

Service in the trade facilitation business, especially our service providers, are well appreciated. Your Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto, we say a big thank you for your royal support. The Press will continue to be our cherished collaborators and we not only thank you, but will continue to partner with you. To the Executive Governors of Kebbi and Zamfara States, we say a big thank you for identifying with our course. His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Sokoto State, Alhaji Megatakardo Wamakko and the government and good people of Sokoto, we thank you immensely for the marvellous reception and providing a conducive atmosphere for us to brainstorm.

9.2. As we wish you journey mercies to your various destinations, we also wish you a Happy Sallah, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in advance. God Bless you all.