

World Customs Organization (WCO)

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Website: www.wcoomd.org

CTITF Working Group Membership:

- Border Management Related to Counter-Terrorism (co-chair)

The World Customs Organization (WCO) is an intergovernmental organization that aims to improve coordination among customs administrations around the world as they facilitate trade and ensure the security of their borders. Specifically, the WCO aims to do the following:

- Set international standards to facilitate cross-border trade
- Secure the international trade supply chain
- Harmonize and simplify customs procedures aimed at facilitating trade
- Strengthen the security of the supply chain
- Foster the exchange of information between customs administrations
- Provide capacity building through training and assistance

In order to coordinate global customs procedures, the WCO promotes and provides guidance for implementing the 1974 *Kyoto Convention*, which was adopted to harmonize and simplify international customs procedures.²⁰⁵ The revised *Kyoto Convention*, which came into force in 2006, offers legal provisions and controls to implement the procedures of the convention and also addresses more up-to-date issues facing customs administrations in greater detail, including electronic commerce.²⁰⁶

The WCO coordinates its activities with a number of United Nations entities working on issues of trade and security, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Though the WCO's work is not directly linked to security threats and counterterrorism, the 9/11 attacks prompted greater emphasis on supply chain security and terrorism among its membership.²⁰⁷ Consequently, the organization initiated a number of programs aimed at reducing the vulnerability of global trade to terrorist attacks. For example, in June 2002, the WCO adopted a resolution noting the threat of terrorism to global trade, and established a Task Force with the private sector called the Joint Customs/Industry Task Force on Security and Facilitation of the Global Supply Chain, to offer guidance and recommendations on coordinating and improving the methods of customs administrations to secure the supply chain. This Task Force produced a package of technical measures, including the Customs Guidelines on Integrated Supply Chain Management, which calls for the application of a risk assessment to the interoperable supply chain.²⁰⁸

These efforts culminated in the adoption of the SAFE Framework of Standards in 2005, in which the WCO set forth voluntary standards for securing international trade as a minimum threshold for member states to adopt. Established after seven meetings between June 2004 and April 2007 by the High Level Strategic Working Group comprised of twelve WCO members, the SAFE Framework focuses on the technical aspect of customs security, primarily through the adoption of risk assessments. The SAFE Standards draw from the WCO's *International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures* (1973), and focuses on four main areas: (1) a commitment to harmonize advance electronic cargo information, (2) the application of a risk assessment, (3) the examination of outbound high-risk cargo by the country of export, and (4) the establishment of supply chain security operators.²⁰⁹

Despite near-universal commitment to these standards (with 162 states committing to date), the costs and technical complexities of the SAFE Framework have led some states to pursue a more gradual and phased implementation process. Consequently, the WCO has initiated a number of capacity-building programs to assist states in this endeavor, including, most notably, the Columbus Programme—Aid for Safe Trade. This program aims for full implementation of the SAFE Framework through needs assessment, planning and implementation

(including donor matchmaking), and monitoring progress and evaluating results.²¹⁰

The WCO also provides capacity-building assistance to support implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004), which aims to prevent nonstate actors from obtaining weapons of mass destruction (WMD), by offering specific training sessions. The WCO's Secretariat assists its members in the implementation of Recommendation IX of the Nine Special Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is a critical component of the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 because it focuses on the transportation of currency suspected to be related to terrorism.²¹¹ Furthermore, the WCO is developing a Correlation Table to assist customs/border-control officers in determining which goods are subject to the 1540 resolution regime and to improve customs' risk-profiling processes.²¹²

Additionally, the WCO Secretariat provides resources to states to assist them with border security. For example, the Secretariat offers a databank on advanced technology, which provides guidance on securing international trade through the supply chain and a list of companies and products that customs administrations might encounter in their work. The Secretariat also assists customs administrations in detecting transnational organized crime through its World Customs Enforcement Network (CEN). This network facilitates the exchange of information with other organizations by providing a database of illegal products, examples of concealment methods, and its own communication systems. The communication systems include CENcomm, a secure platform for international exchange of operational information and intelligence and the National Customs Enforcement Network (NCEN), a national database for enforcement and intelligence purposes with a platform to exchange information with other customs administrations.²¹³

The WCO's inclusion in the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force is based primarily on its efforts to enhance international security by strengthening national customs administrations tasked with regulating trade and movements across their borders. These objectives are reflected in Pillars II and III of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which respectively urge states to

take measures to prevent and combat terrorism and the international community to help strengthen state capacities to do so.²¹⁴ The WCO is a co-chair of the CTITF Working Group on Border Management Related to Counter-Terrorism, together with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). This working group is currently compiling a compendium of counterterrorism-related border-control instruments, standards, training materials, and recommended practices.²¹⁵