**Speech AFRITAC Centre**

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**WCO Conference of Directors General of Customs of the WCO West and Central Africa Region**

**May 4-5, 2023**

**Banjul, The Gambia**

* Commissioner General and Commissioner of Customs Gambia Revenue Authority
* Secretary General of the World Customs Organization
* Ladies and Gentlemen Director General of Customs of the WCO WCA Region
* Representatives of Regional Economic Communities and international development partners
* Distinguished guests,

I am Philippe Egoumé, Director of AFRITAC Centre, the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Capacity Development Center for Central Africa in Libreville, Gabon. This Center's mission is to strengthen the institutional, technical and human capacities of nine Central African countries and the CEMAC Commission, in collaboration with other development partners, in order to help the authorities better achieve their objectives in matters of economic and financial policy.

I am accompanied by Mr. Bernard Zbinden, the resident Customs adviser of my structure. Many of you already know him, he used to be the WCO Coordinator for the West and Central Africa Region.

It is a great pleasure and an honor for me to speak at this prestigious Conference and I thank the organizers for giving me this opportunity. I would also like to thank the Government of The Gambia and the Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) for the warm welcome and the professional support we receive here on their land.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my intervention has two major objectives:

1. To inform you of the work of AFRITAC Central to support the interconnectivity of Central African Customs systems to facilitate and secure transit, and
2. To seek the support of this Conference, and more particularly of the Customs DGs of Central Africa and the WCO, to launch this important project in practice.

This is an opportunity for me to recall that transit interconnectivity in the ECOWAS zone was achieved with the support of a group of development partners, including the WCO, and that the Interconnected System for the Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) is already operational in several countries in West Africa for road and rail transit.

Finally, it is also an opportunity for me to recall that this Conference had recommended to Customs in Central Africa, a few years ago, to deploy and operationalize SIGMAT also in their sub-region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, AFRITAC Center has conducted missions in Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo to analyze the current situation with regard to transit interconnectivity and more generally to assess the legal framework and transit procedures in place. This work has shown that there are some initiatives aimed at transit interconnectivity, particularly between Cameroon, Chad and CAR. However, transit in this sub-region is still very bureaucratic, slow and costly and many measures to secure transit are not always coordinated between the countries concerned nor are they always effective. We can give as an example:

* Satellite tracking systems that only work in a single country instead of covering the entire route from departure to the final transit destination.
* Bonds that are only valid in the country where the bond is deposited.
* The scanning of more and more transits at the transit departure, exit, entry and/or destination, without exchanging images between the countries involved in the transit.
* The multiple checkpoints along the route through which the transited goods must pass. These checkpoints are manned by Customs, Police, Gendarmerie and other actors, multiplying the costs for operators.

Each country has its own procedures, systems and tools for these transits, despite a regulatory framework that has existed at the CEMAC level since 2010. This framework requires harmonization of transit and interconnection of customs systems.

This is also why AFRITAC organized in Douala, from April 11 to 14, a regional workshop on transit interconnectivity in Central Africa. It was attended by legal, procedural and IT specialists from eight customs administrations in the sub-region, the ECOWAS, CEMAC and ECCAS Commissions, UNCTAD and the European Union. Côte d’Ivoire and Burkinabe Customs also participated to share their experiences in terms of transit interconnectivity and the use of SIGMAT in their countries.

At the end of this workshop, the participants unanimously adopted a list of recommendations which we distributed to all the delegations present here. I would like to draw your attention to the most important ones, which Mr. Zbinden will briefly present to you:

Reading of the most important recommendations at the end of this document (projection on slides).

Ladies and Gentlemen, the recommendations of your legal and IT experts are clear. IT interconnectivity and harmonization of procedures and data to jointly manage transit operations is also a must for Central Africa. These measures are recommended or even required by the relevant standards of the WCO, and the WTO, CEMAC, ECCAS, but also those of the African Union for the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Some of you might wonder about the reasons for the IMF to support Customs transit and interconnectivity through AFRITAC Centre when we know that the focus of this organization is the mobilization of resources in the wide sense.

I would like to give you some answers to this question:

* This initiative aims to facilitate transit operations for economic operators but should also enable customs administrations in the sub-region to better secure transit procedures. Remember that transit is a procedure for which the duties and taxes of transited goods are suspended, and that poor management of transit can generate a considerable loss of revenue for the State.
* This shows how important the stakes of transit are and underlines the benefit of initiatives that will make it possible to harmonize and dematerialize transit procedures. The harmonization and simplification of transit allows operators to speed up and make import operations less costly, which can also make goods cheaper in destination markets.
* Transit facilitation should stimulate international trade and improve the investment climate, thereby generating revenue for the state.
* The lack of improvement in transit can have significant consequences, especially for landlocked countries that heavily depend on goods reaching them from the seaports of coastal countries. Food shortages, humanitarian crises and security crises can be exacerbated by non-functional and non-compliant transits. Unfortunately, we have already experienced this in our region.

It is therefore time to implement harmonized procedures, computerize transit and interconnect customs systems in Central Africa.

It is also time to adapt to other regions of the world, including that of ECOWAS in West Africa. At present, some of these regions operate their transit with a single declaration and a single guarantee (bond), from the point of departure to the point of final destination in another country, if necessary by transiting through one or more countries.

If we fail in harmonizing transit procedures and interconnecting Customs systems, Central African countries risk losing more ground and accentuating the problem of lack of competitiveness that already exists today.

Ladies and gentlemen, Central Africa has mainly two options.

1. Develop a particular approach and solution for Central Africa, or else
2. Build on the experience of another region which knows realities and has a comparable environment.

As you have heard, your legal, procedural and technical experts recommend the second option, that is to build on the experience of ECOWAS and to use SIGMAT standards also for transits in Central Africa.

AFRITAC Central supports this recommendation and is ready to continue its assistance to the project. I can also say that other development partners have expressed their interest in supporting this project, provided that you, Directors General of Central African Customs, take the formal decision to move towards this solution together and that you adopt the recommendations of your Experts. If you do so, then the project will be able to start quickly.

I would like to end my remarks by once again expressing my thanks to the Government and Customs of The Gambia for their hospitality here in Banjul, and to the WCO WCA Region for having invited AFRITAC Central to this important conference.

I thank you for your kind attention.





