



Tackling Eco-Crime in Greater Mekong Subregion

Customs Officers Get Boost in Addressing Illegal Trade in Environmental Goods

Bangkok, 5 September 2007 – Twenty-five Customs Officers from Thailand, Cambodia, China, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam met today in Bangkok, Thailand for a Green Customs Workshop designed to increase their capacity to tackle illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The workshop, which will run from 5-7 September is part of the Green Customs Initiative to curb illegal trade in environmental goods and organized by the Customs Department of the Kingdom of Thailand, in cooperation with UNEP, the World Customs Organization Asia and Pacific Regional Office of Capacity Building (WCO ROCB) and the U.S. Department of State.

During the workshop, participants will learn about Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) under which a number of chemicals, including persistent organic pollutants and chemicals that deplete the ozone layer, are now controlled, banned or subject to phase outs. They will also learn about trends in illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities in Asia and the Pacific and different countries' experiences in dealing with this issue.

“Illegal trade in environmental goods has high social and economic costs. Customs Officers, who are at the forefront of countries' efforts in combating this trade can play an important role in checking this trade and its high cost to society,” said Hiroshi Nishimiya, Deputy Regional Director, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Environmental crime and illegal trade is, by some estimates, valued at tens of billion if not well over 100 billion dollars a year.

“This training-of-trainers will enhance the capacity of customs authorities to detect and act on movement of these illegal goods. It will also help them exchange ideas and experiences and develop common tools that they can use to address the problem,” said Mr. Chavalit Sethameteekul, Director-General of Thai Customs.

Since the establishment of the Green Customs Initiative in 2001, several Green Customs fora were organized worldwide. The first phase focused on raising awareness and pilot of the draft Green Customs Training Guide. The Initiative is now entering its second phase using a Green Customs module in national customs training curriculum.

“The U.S. government is happy to be able to assist in making this a truly regional workshop. We are grateful to the Thai Customs, the World Customs Organization, and UNEP for their efforts in organizing the event. We are particularly pleased that other countries in the Southeast Asia region are demonstrating their interest in the Green Customs Initiative by their participation in the workshop over these three days,” said James Waller, Regional Environmental Officer, US Embassy, Bangkok.

“This workshop is a significant opportunity for the customs officers in the region. We can learn the essence of the MEAs, world, regional and national trend of legal and illegal trade, WCO tools, and building up the cooperation mechanism. For the customs officers, protecting society from the illegal trafficking of environmentally hazardous goods and endangered plants and animals is relatively new issue

but very important, that is why we still need capacity building on this matter for the effective and efficient control. WCO ROCB (Asia Pacific Regional office for Capacity Building) is very happy to be involved this invaluable workshop,” said Yoko Odashima, Deputy Head of ROCB, Technical Attache, WCO Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB).

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

GREEN CUSTOMS INITIATIVE

The Green Customs Initiative offers a coordinated approach, as intended in the Bali Strategic Plan, for providing capacity building to enforcement officers (starting with customs officials) to help them monitor trade in commodities of environmental concern. The initiative is a partnership of 7 convention Secretariats and 3 international organizations, facilitated by UNEP DTIE’s OzonAction Programme. In 2007 the initiative will disseminate the training module through regional train-the-trainer workshops and national pilot projects.

This initiative is supported by the secretariats of the World Customs Organization (WCO), Interpol, CITES, the Basel Convention, the Rotterdam Convention, the Stockholm Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). UNEP is the coordinator of the Initiative.

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

UNEP is the United Nations system’s designated entity for addressing environmental issues at the global and regional level. Its mandate is to coordinate the development of environmental policy consensus by keeping the global environment under review and bringing emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

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