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Welcome address

by

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at the

UNECE International Conference on Future directions for Single Window

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His Excellency Ambassador Cedeno, distinguished delegates, dear participants,

Welcome to the 2017 UNECE International Conference on Single Window.

Single Window became an international standard at UNECE, developed by the UN Centre of Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), back in 2004 in Recommendation n° 33.

Single Window has a strong trade facilitation potential. It makes trade easier and faster, and connects developing economies to value chains that are increasingly global.

The worldwide separation of production cycles, just-in-time logistic techniques and the emergence of e-business, have made companies more dependent on efficient, fast and reliable movement of goods. This has highlighted the need for a more efficient management of trade transactions.

And that is why the Single Window standard has been adopted by many major economies around the world, and by organizations such as the World Customs Organization and the World Trade Organization. It is, in fact, an integral part of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, which entered into force in February this year, as a best endeavor requirement, in article 10.4.

But Single Window is also a catalyst for many other measures of the Agreement which relate to border crossing. These include the use of international standards, the enhancement of clearance procedures, the encouragement of border agency cooperation or the improvement of transparency, to name but a few.

Of course, such an all-encompassing trade facilitation mechanism is complicated to put in place. This is most likely why Single Window is the measure with the most category C notifications in the WTO Agreement. Most developing and transition economies are looking for technical and financial assistance to establish their Single Window systems.

Moreover, it is not only developing or transition economies that encounter challenges. In many advanced economies of the UNECE region, implementing Single Window implies revamping multiple legacy systems. We see that agencies with a long tradition of cross border trade have

often developed their own systems, which are not necessarily compatible with those of other agencies. A Single Window is supposed to coordinate the business processes and data needs of multiple government agencies at the border. Therefore, these should be streamlined into a single portal for declarations and responses. But for this, each agency needs to reengineer their legacy system, which can have major legal, economic and technical repercussions.

Thirteen years after its inception, we can see the success of the concept of Single Window, and the challenges ahead for its full implementation. This is why it is very important that our recommendations remain visionary. They should not merely reflect best practices of today, but plan for future evolutions and the long-term objective of making trade a true engine of economic growth for all, and of sustainable development. We should support the achievement of the relevant targets of the 2030 Agenda, like those under SDG17 for a rules based, open, transparent and inclusive international trading system.

Your work over the next two days will be key to the evolution of our guidance in this area and to any necessary updates of Recommendation n°33 on Single Window Implementation. You will also hear about some of the new technologies which have entered the market and which will likely have a great impact on the way we trade, and shape single windows. These include blockchain, internet-of-things, data pipelines and many others.

Lastly, I would like to encourage you all to keep in mind the impact of any revision of UNECE Recommendation n° 33. As it is used by so many countries around the world and by many other international organizations, we need to ensure that developing and transition economies are involved in the revision. It is good to see that the WTO, the WCO, UNCTAD and other international organizations will be participating in this event, and hopefully in any subsequent revision work.

I would like to conclude by thanking the experts, panelists, discussants and all the participants for their participation and contribution to the discussion. I wish you a fruitful Conference.