



Press release*

Ramallah

Building Palestinian Sovereignty: Palestinian Customs' Pioneering Steps

State-of-the-art web-based system to facilitate trade and inform policy decisions

A state of the art web-based system, *ASYCUDA WORLD*, was officially launched by Palestinian Customs today, August 10th 2009, after years of relentless efforts. A special ceremony was held to mark this event at Best Eastern Hotel in Ramallah under the patronage of Dr. Salam Fayyad, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, with the participation of Mr. Christian Berger, the Representative of the European Commission (EC), and the representatives of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the main partners for the Palestinian customs modernization programme.

Out of the 90 countries that use the *ASYCUDA* system – known locally as *TAWASOL* - to manage their customs, the Palestinian Customs service is one of the first 10 national customs authorities to adopt the latest version, *ASYCUDA WORLD*.

This is the final phase of upgrading the Palestinian Custom's computerized system, within the context of a broad programme for modernizing Palestinian Customs. The use of the upgraded *TAWASOL* system will help simplify Customs procedures, to the benefit of Palestinian importers and exporters, as well as informing the policy-making process. The modernization programme, which began in 2000, is implemented by UNCTAD, and funded by the European Union since 2003, as part of the strategic vision for building the institutions of Palestinian sovereignty.

It is a source of pride that the customization of the *ASYCUDA WORLD* system to the unique Palestinian policy environment and its specific needs was accomplished

* For further information, please contact Mr. Misyeef Misyeef, *ASYCUDA-TAWASOL* project Coordinator, Telephone: 02-2420018, Mobile: 0599456457 or email: misyef@asycuda.ps

mainly by a team of Palestinian professionals, with some support from UNCTAD's experts.

This represents a qualitative shift in the management of Palestinian customs, its ability to use the most up-to-date technology and to build specialized national professional capacities. The system will be running at the Palestinian Customs headquarters and rolled out to all the 13 Customs offices in the West Bank. By the end of this year, the system will be fully introduced to the Palestinian Customs' Vehicles Department, and will be connected via the internet to the Ministry of Transportation to facilitate the business of public and private institutions and individuals.

The newly acquired institutional and human capacity is expected to enhance the Palestinian capability for risk management, post-auditing, reducing fraud and smuggling, generating data to inform public policy and increasing customs and tax revenues. The system will make it much faster and less costly for Palestinian exporters and importers to process transactions by allowing them to use e-mail, direct entry and electronic processing of external trade procedures. Palestinian customs clearance agents and private companies engaged in export and import activities can now process customs declarations and related documents electronically on-line from their own premises without having to visit Customs offices.

Mr. Hatem Yousef, Director General of Customs and Excise Directorate, Ministry of Finance, asserts that, "This system will improve the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to manage the economy through the adoption of the latest technologies of e-government, especially upon the completion by the Palestinian Customs of the single window/single file system, which started in tandem with this stage of ASYCUDA-TAWASOL system". Mr. Yousef also affirms the Palestinian Authority's readiness to manage the flow of passengers and goods through all border crossing points. This readiness was demonstrated during the brief period, 2005-2006, in which the ASYCUDA system was applied by Palestinian professionals at the Rafah border crossing point in accordance with the Access and Movement Agreement.

The *ASYCUDA WORLD* system offers the technological, procedural and administrative infrastructure for the Palestinian customs system, which aims at facilitating Palestinian trade with electronic single-window and single-file, in line with international standards and rules of the World Customs Organization. With this remarkable achievement, Palestinian Customs has taken a leading role in building the institutional foundations for a sovereign Palestinian state and has made a significant contribution towards the emergence of an independent Palestinian state in the future.