



U.S. CANDIDATE IAN C. SAUNDERS

WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION
SECRETARY GENERAL CAMPAIGN
NEWSLETTER

FIRST EDITION – FEBRUARY 15, 2023

CANDIDATE'S CORNER

Dear Customs Leaders,

Greetings from Washington. It is a privilege to write you following the formal notification of the United States putting me forward as its candidate to be the next Secretary General of the World Customs Organization. I am humbled by the opportunity to offer my service to the global customs community in this capacity, and to represent my country in such a unique way. I am equally humbled by the warm welcome back and by the openness that many colleagues have shown over the past several months.

In June last year, U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced the United States' intention to nominate me for this important post. The timing of that announcement afforded me the chance to reestablish an understanding of the critical issues facing you at the national level as well as in the WCO. The last months also allowed me to talk with colleagues from Europe, Asia, the Americas, Middle East, and Africa; to learn from you; and to use what you shared to inform what I should pursue if named Secretary General. In this vein, I now look forward to participating in the WCO's Fragile Border Conference in Abuja.

This newsletter, the first in a monthly series, is my channel for sharing what I am doing over the course of this campaign. More importantly, it will share ideas about my vision for the WCO, a vision enriched by your input and that will sharpen as I speak with more of you.

My vision is to lead the organization to provide high-quality, responsive service to its members by drawing on its rich past, optimizing present efforts, and driving Customs toward a safe, prosperous and inclusive future. My goal is to lead the WCO in a manner that enables it to help customs administrations worldwide to protect, deliver, evolve, and engage.

For this first edition, however, I will focus on what I have learned over the past 6 months. In subsequent editions, I will offer specific ideas and approaches related to each of these themes. It is my hope that you will find that they support goals that we all share.

Thank you for your consideration of my candidacy.

As a key element of my approach is openness, I would be pleased to receive any feedback you wish to offer.

I can be reached at IanSaundersWCO@trade.gov, or you can contact CBP Senior Advisor Christina Bell at christina.a.bell@cbp.dhs.gov.

WHAT I HAVE HEARD

Since September, I have been actively working to understand what matters to you as member administrations of the WCO. I appreciate the many opportunities I have had to listen to customs stakeholders from all over the world these past months. Understanding what members are focused on, their local needs, and what they would like to see in a future WCO administration provides an essential frame for how the organization can best support the global customs community.

As an official candidate, I will continue to meet with members. I look forward to the regional meetings and other events, as well as the ability to meet virtually. Gathering insights from you is – and will be – a core element of my approach during the campaign and, should I be elected, during my tenure as Secretary General. I also commit to provide strong and responsive leadership to the WCO Secretariat and Members as we forge our path to excellence in customs.

Over the course of numerous meetings with representatives from member administrations, I have discerned some common points of interest. Some of them validate efforts the WCO is already undertaking. Others, however, speak to new issues we need to consider as we look toward our future.



Ideas Members have expressed include:

- The need for prioritization of the many demands placed on the WCO has been a clear theme.
- Members see it important for the WCO to excel in the performance of its core work pursuant to its conventions, guidelines, and frameworks – and that this work include effective, responsive, and feedback-oriented capacity building.
- The importance of the WCO being informed by a vision that guides its being a recognized center of customs excellence and expertise and a world class organization in its operation.
- The need for transparency and strong governance has been emphasized.
- There is interest in identifying new approaches to manage the organization's approach to donor funding – in a way that ensures due emphasis on core WCO mandates.
- Gender equality and diversity in Customs have been confirmed as key issues to address.
- The need for inclusivity and effective member participation – in large measure enabled by the use of additional languages in the WCO – has been passionately conveyed by a number of colleagues.
- The value of timely, appropriate, and substantive engagement with the private sector has been communicated by both Members and stakeholders.
- The need for Members and the WCO to evolve and be agile in the face of global trade challenges – both threats posed by illicit actors and new trends in legitimate trade – is a key concern for many Customs leaders and staff-level practitioners.
- Several raised a need for different meeting formats and to find ways to enable the Council to engage in more strategic considerations.

I look forward to keeping you apprised of what I hear from colleagues, and to sharing in subsequent newsletters some of my ideas to address topics you view as critical to the WCO's success and that of its member administrations.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN CUSTOMS



My vision for the WCO includes an imperative to increase and sustain focus on organizational health issues such as gender equality.

While we traditionally have given significant attention to improving the procedures and tools that enable our work as Customs, we also know that none of us can be successful without a well-trained and motivated workforce – a workforce prepared to address the traditional and the novel challenges that confront us in the trade environment.

Diversity in the workforce, particularly gender equality, warrants our attention as a sustained line of effort in the WCO. I've heard this from numerous members. It's a concern grounded in the 2022 WCO Annual Survey, which showed that on average, 38% of Customs employees are women and 62% are men. In senior management positions, 22% are women and only 17% of Heads of Customs are female.

As of today, Customs doesn't reflect society and, as such, it doesn't have access to the full range of problem-solving perspectives or the widest array of talent.

Yet, we know our adversaries spare no effort in circumventing us. My sense is that workforce diversity, and specifically gender equality, is something we can pursue to ensure that every motivated human resource is brought to delivering our Customs mission.

There are many things the WCO can do, both in identifying good practices for Members and in modeling certain standards as an organization itself.

I applaud the efforts to date of the WCO's Virtual Working Group on Gender Diversity in Customs and the establishment of the Network for Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs. We must complement these efforts

and build upon the momentum in the last Council discussions.

Concretely, I will look to establish a senior advisory council that contemplates these issues, champions the cause, and provides timely and concrete guidance to the WCO leadership.

I also will explore how we can highlight successes that have accrued from workforce diversity – and find ways to celebrate them as reflective of one of our community's key values. I will rely on the expertise and ideas of members who have good practices; this is a program area that still needs to grow.

That said, I assure you, as Members, of my commitment to this topic as something that strengthens the core of our organizations:

OUR PEOPLE.

IN CLOSING

An expression from a member has remained with me upon hearing it: “One size fits none” – meaning, the work of the WCO needs to be premised on the understanding of our different needs and our unique challenges. But we can also focus on areas that unite us as Customs.

If given the honor and privilege to serve the WCO as Secretary General, I will be eager to ensure the best input and resources are available to inspire, guide, and support the WCO’s actions amid our current and future challenges. In the meantime, I look forward to continuing to listen to and engage with members and stakeholders from across the world!

