

**Velma Ricketts Walker, JP**  
**Chair's Remarks – CBC11 International Women's Day Activities**  
**March 6, 2020**  
**WCO HQ, Brussels, Belgium**



**Mrs. Velma Ricketts Walker, CEO/Commissioner, Jamaica Customs Agency, is the first female Chair of the Capacity Building Committee for the World Customs Organization**

Our celebration of International Women's Day (celebrated on March 8<sup>th</sup>), under the theme ***"I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights,"*** has seen much progress in advancing gender equality and diversity in Customs, with the WCO providing robust support, as a part of its capacity building programmes.

**Background & WCO Initiatives**

Gender equality and diversity is a hot topic, and rightfully so, because it is long overdue in our places of work, and in our countries. These are fundamental rights under the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), which supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5, in achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls; and also the World Trade Organization's (WTO) "Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment" (2017).

Since the launch of its Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT) in 2013, the WCO has been providing sustained capacity building support for our Customs administrations. ***A snapshot of the CB initiatives includes:***

1. **GEOAT:** a tool which assists Customs to assess their own policies and procedures to advance gender equality and diversity.
2. **Blended Training Package:** this includes an e-learning module "Advancing Gender Equality in Customs", which is available on the CLiKC! Platform.
3. **Launch of the Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity** to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices, and to promote awareness of the GEOAT. The Working Group is further supported by a dedicated section on the CLiKC! Platform, where they can share reports and best practices.
4. **Inclusion of a module on Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in the Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programme and the People Development Diagnostic Tool.**

**Jamaica Customs**

The Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) has recognized the importance of gender equality and diversity, and has been pursuing measures to achieve this worthy objective. The JCA has an unusual scenario, where our staff complement is made up of a 68:32 ratio of females to males. However, we understand that gender equality and diversity speaks to much more than just equality for women or having an equal number of females to males, indeed it is about ensuring the work environment has the conditions to allow equal opportunities for both women and men to thrive and grow and to unleash their innovation and creativity to the benefit of the organization. We have therefore strived to foster a culture that reflects this mindset and has taken practical measures in terms of embracing performance based management and adjusting our recruitment process.

Our Human Resource Management & Development Team has also been very active, having implemented several initiatives to engage and empower staff. Some of these initiatives include 'HR on the Move', which comprises unit by unit sessions; 'HRMPowerment', a capacity building initiative to properly equip supervisors and managers for their roles; 'HR Did You Know', which provides frequent information email-blasts on important or topical employment matters; and #CustomsMoves, which is a health and wellness initiative. An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is also in place, offering counselling to staff and their families, where it may be required.

As a part of the **Virtual Working Group on Gender Equality and Diversity**, we have been sharing our experiences and we encourage all Members to do the same.

Today, we have been presented with an important commitment in the form of the **Draft Declaration of the Customs Cooperation Council on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs**. With all your support, we commit to implement comprehensive and sustainable policies, procedures and activities to promote gender equality and diversity. Further, let us all support the WCO's one week sensitization campaign by sharing our initiatives and stories on social media and with the WCO Secretariat. In the words of Ryunosuke Satoro, ***"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."*** Together we can turn the tide and advance gender equality and diversity.

**Happy International Women's Day to all women, and to those who support this worthy cause!**

Find further information via the WCO's social media accounts: Twitter: @WCO\_OMD; Facebook: @WCOOMD; LinkedIn: @World Customs Organization

**#womenincustoms #customsforequality #customsfordiversity**