

ADDRESS

by

Mr S.Lal

Director General, MRA

On the occasion of the

REGIONAL SEMINAR ON

"INTEGRITY IN CUSTOMS"

Organised by the IMF Afritac South

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**Afritac South IMF Africa Training Institute,
6th Floor, Bramer House, Cyber City, Ebene**

**Mr Kenneth Head, Afritac South Regional Customs
Adviser**

Mr Greg Goatbe, IMF-AFS Customs Expert

Guest Speakers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

First of all, I would like to thank IMF Afritac South for having invited me as ‘Chief Guest’ for this Opening Ceremony.

2. My presence today, is first and foremost to support AFRITAC South in their endeavour to empower tax and customs officials in the region to enhance their skills and competencies and take their organisations as well as their country to new heights. Allow me therefore to also congratulate IMF AFRITAC South for the excellent work done so far and keep it up, gentlemen!!!

3. The theme of this seminar, today, is: ‘*Integrity in Customs*’. The World Customs Organization has defined the term “integrity” as “*a positive set of attitudes which foster honest and ethical behavior and work practices*”. This definition implies that integrity is more than mere absence of abuse of power and corruption; it includes delivering services to meet the organizational objectives. It also entails doing the right things in all circumstances, even if no-one is watching you.

4. Customs administrations operate in a highly dynamic world with new emerging priorities such as national security, safety, health, environment, fight against counterfeiting and counter-terrorism activities. As the priorities change so fast, the approaches to the issue of integrity of customs officers require a dynamic strategy and clearly need to occupy a central stage. Indeed, as Charles Darwin once said, “*It is not the strongest of the species who survives, not the most intelligent one, but the one most responsive to the change*”.

5. Ladies and gentlemen, shortcomings or lack of integrity in Customs is not merely an issue between the corruptor and

the corrupted. It has wide reaching implications in an economy such as:

- Revenue leakage
- Creation of an unnecessary barrier to international trade & economic growth
- Reduction in public trust & confidence in government institutions
- Increased costs which are ultimately borne by society
- Reduction in the level of voluntary compliance with Customs legislations
- Reduction in national security & community protection

6. However, we must realise the fact that corruption is an international phenomenon that exists in all spheres of life. Consequently, to tackle the breaches of integrity principles and to combat corrupt practices, be it in Customs or other administrations, we need to adopt a proactive and concerted approach.

7. One of the principal strategies that has been implemented to combat corruption and ensure *interalia* that Customs Officers harness and foster utmost integrity when dealing with

stakeholders has been to separate Customs administrations from the General Public Service and restructure them into autonomous or semi-autonomous statutory bodies.

8. Another key strategy to tackle integrity issues in Customs Administrations has been to adopt a series of WCO integrity tools such as the Revised Arusha Declaration, Guide to Corruption Risk Mapping, Guide to Prevent Procurement Corruption in Customs, Model Code of Ethics & Conduct, Integrity Development Guide, Integrity e-learning Module etc.

9. Ladies and Gentlemen, corruption can be best tackled in four basic arenas:

- The basic institution of good governance needs to be strengthened,
- The capacity and integrity of enforcement need to be enhanced,
- The need to put in place a set of preventive tools, and
- The public needs to be sensitised on the advantages of good governance and their participation in promoting it.

10. Of these four, I firmly believe that most customs administrations are lagging behind on the last one, that is, sensitising stakeholders through anti-corruption and integrity workshops, conferences, seminars, fora, and surveys. Indeed, we must realise that building integrity in Customs is a shared responsibility of Customs administrations, the business community and the civil society and work towards getting everybody on board.

11. Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to end my intervention by reminding all of us here present that “*public service is a public trust*”. Therefore, Customs employees have a responsibility to place loyalty to the government, laws and ethical principles above private gain. The public is entitled to have complete confidence, trust and respect in the integrity of its Customs administrations and to expect all Customs employees to be honest, impartial and professional in the manner in which they employ their skills, knowledge, experience and official authorities.

On this note, Ladies & Gentlemen, let me wish you all a fruitful and enriching seminar.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!