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THE ROLE OF CUSTOMS SERVICES AND WORLD CUSTOMS  
ORGANIZATION'S ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMME TO  
COMBAT NUCLEAR AND OTHER RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS SMUGGLING

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Summary

The World Customs Organization (established as the Customs Co-operation Council in 1952) is an independent inter-governmental body with world-wide membership (149) whose enforcement mission could be summarized as "to assist its Members in strengthening their enforcement measures through training and technical programmes designed to combat Customs offences" which also include nuclear and other radioactive materials smuggling.

One of the best strategies for an effective fight against illicit trafficking in nuclear and other radioactive materials is to stop their illegal movement at the national border before entering or leaving the country. From this point, Customs services are unique governmental cross-border control agencies, which are mostly located at national cross-border checking points. In addition to this local advantage, Customs expertise and authority in checking documents, goods, vehicle and passengers deserve special mentioning. It should also be noted that Customs services have great experience on how to combat and respond to transnational crime and criminals. On the other hand, in order to maximize on their experience, they should be furnished with sufficient authority for investigation, detection equipment and supported through relevant training programmes.

In line with the request made by Member States, the World Customs Organization (WCO) Secretariat has recently developed an enforcement programme on combatting nuclear and other radioactive materials smuggling. This programme is based on awareness raising, development of training materials, designing training programmes, promoting exchange of information and improving co-operation at all levels. The WCO Database, the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison (RILO) project and WCO bilateral and multilateral co-operative initiatives are three key tools which enable Customs administrations to develop accurate, timely and rapid exchange of information and intelligence.

Within the concept of international co-operation, the WCO signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on 13 May 1998 and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention on 17 November 1997 for further joint initiatives. Both international organizations are now conducting several joint technical meetings, training programmes and producing safety publications for law enforcement agencies.