

Distinguished Chairman (Deputy Chairman), dear participants,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this opening event. On behalf of OSCE, I want to thank the State Customs Service of Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan's Customs Service, the MFAs of Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, as well as from the Afghan National Customs Academy in Kabul.

Kyrgyzstan, as an OSCE participating State, has given its full support for the OSCE Ministerial Decision on Engagement with Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan's practical support includes today's event : that is the inclusion of Afghan Customs officials in the Customs Training Development Project.

Today the **first session begins of a six-week course** for customs officers from Afghanistan, taught by Afghan and Kyrgyz customs instructors. **Similar courses** will be organized regularly by the OSCE in cooperation with Kyrgyzstan's Customs Training Centre.

We particularly welcome the arrival and the involvement of the first Afghan participants in this customs training programme.

I want to thank the sponsors, the Governments of Japan, Luxembourg and Norway, for funding this 27-month programme to the value of 1.7 million euros.

The purpose of the joint training programme of Kyrgyz and Afghan customs officers is to improve customs officer skills with a **comprehensive curriculum**, in the areas of fight against smuggling and duty collection. The programme will contribute to efforts to curb the illegal cross-border movement of goods, services and people while at the same time facilitating legal movement.

The issues faced by the Customs Services in both Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan are mainly similar. Thus, the project also aims to improve **wider regional relations** and opens the path for further co-operation.

The programme will develop a comprehensive training curriculum, the establishment of a professional training unit and the enhancement of training infrastructure within Kyrgyzstan's Customs Training Centre in Bishkek. The project activities will, therefore, further professionalize the personnel of the Customs Services of Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan so as to enhance revenue collection and protection, increase security efforts against terrorism, contraband, narcotics and controlled goods, modernize trade and transport facilitation and participate in a co-ordinated border management structure.

Finally, I want to congratulate **the Kyrgyz customs training centre** in establishing a permanent team of trainers and for delivering successfully in June the first courses in the customs offices of Bishkek as well as in the provinces. In September, the organization of a one month Entry level training, with a comprehensive curriculum developed by the trainers, will be a significant achievement.

Once again, I thank all those who have made this training possible and look forward to ongoing cooperation and achievements.

Thank you for your attention.