

Sars commissioner takes the helm as chairperson of WCO

The South African Revenue Service (Sars) has expressed its delight as Commissioner Edward Kieswetter assumes the role of chairperson at the World Customs Organisation (WCO). The election occurred on 24 June, 2023, during the WCO Council session held at the organisation's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.



Source: South African Revenue Service. Commissioner Edward Kieswetter.

The WCO has 185 members, three-quarters of which are developing countries and the Council is its highest decision-making body.

It was established in 1952 as the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC), is the only intergovernmental organisation exclusively focused on customs matters and is recognised as the voice of the global customs community. In 1994, the CCC adopted the working name of the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

In accepting the challenge to lead the WCO for a year, Kieswetter expressed appreciation to his colleagues. He said that “leadership is an inordinate responsibility and a rare privilege to assist international efforts to bring matters of customs to the centre of international trade facilitation.

The elections were preceded by the Policy Commission. The discussions at the Policy Commission ranged from progress on WCO customs technical programmes, emerging and new challenges plaguing the customs world, and organisational development issues around governance and modernisation of the WCO as a members-driven organisation.

Given the foregoing topical issues on the agenda currently, Kieswetter sits at the pinnacle of a global stage to provide appropriate stewardship that will ensure that the WCO is fit for purpose and stays relevant in providing leadership and support to the global customs community.

“ WCO Council elects Ian Saunders as new Secretary General

<https://t.co/yF1ImmFulw#WCO #Customs pic.twitter.com/PdHbFkHWiV>— World Customs Organization (@WCO_OMD) June 24, 2023 ”

Shaping the tenure: key points

Kieswetter, in his capacity as the chairperson, highlighted the key points that will shape his tenure, emphasising the following agenda:

- Collaborating closely with fellow members from different countries to actively listen and translate the strategic vision of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) into tangible actions.
- Ensuring the WCO secretariat operates efficiently and effectively.
- Implementing a comprehensive modernisation plan to bring about transformation within the organisation.

- Establishing a well-defined set of priorities to guide decision-making and resource allocation, and
- Fostering a clear understanding of what success entails and striving to achieve it collectively.



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Promoting inclusivity: a strong focus on women

The agenda also looks at:

- Advocating for greater inclusivity with a strong focus on women and people with disabilities.
- Building resilient and effective partnerships with all stakeholders.
- Striving towards an enhanced profile of the important role of customs in the service of society and ensuring the wellbeing especially of the most vulnerable. The previous and only other time the country chaired the WCO Council was between 2001 to 2006 under the leadership of the then Commissioner, Pravin Gordhan.

Kieswetter thanked the outgoing secretary general, Kunio Mikuriya and chairman, Ahmed Al-Khalifa for their abled stewardship that drove so successfully the agenda of the organisation.

The policy commission also elected Ian Sanders of the United States as the new secretary general of the WCO. Sanders will start his term on 1 January, 2024.

Finally, Kieswetter thanked his colleagues from the African continent especially east and southern Africa, the Brics partners and other regions for bestowing this honour to South Africa.

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