

Stronger PH transportation, logistics services urged



The Committee for ASEAN Economic Community (CAEC) chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) held a two-day roundtable discussion (RTD) of transportation and logistics to help increase Philippine competitiveness and compliance with the ASEAN Economic Community. TRADE provided support to the gathering attended by over 60 representatives from government, the private sector, and academe.

TRADE Chief of Party Dr. Cielito Habito explained how globalization has changed trade patterns, saying companies today look overseas for lower-cost goods and services so that value chains — or the whole system involved in moving products or services from origin to end-users — now extend beyond national borders. Efficient transportation and logistics are vital to creating and maintaining these global value chains by connecting supply/information systems, from points of origin for materials, to processing, packaging and final delivery to consumers.

Dr. Henry Basilio, Chief of Party the USAID Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) Project, spoke on challenges, constraints, and barriers to transport-logistics and their effects on Philippine competitiveness.

Participants and resource speakers at the CAEC RTD stressed the need for strong collaboration between the private sector, government, and other stakeholders.

The RTD identified areas of action to further enable the Philippines to reap the full benefits of the AEC. These include legal limitations imposed on procurement and foreign equity participation; inconsistencies between national and local policies that impede government efforts to streamline ways and minimize costs of doing business in the country, and the need for more infrastructure development — all of which could be spearheaded by the DTI, Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC), and National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) working in partnership with the private sector, as well as the National Competitiveness Council.

Another area highlighted was the need for a Logistics Masterplan, and the creation of a national body to take the lead in planning and implementing improvements in infrastructure, and coordinating between different agencies for the successful implementation of reforms. In the short term, a Logistics Task Force will be formed by the DTI-Competitiveness Bureau, DOTC-Planning, and DOTC subsidiary agencies.

New BoC List simplifies import procedures

The Bureau of Customs recently released its Regulated Imports List, identifying regulated products and the required permits and procedures to clear these goods through Customs. The list is designed to promote transparency in import procedures, and will be used for reference by BoC frontliners to reduce potential confusion caused by unclear or overlapping import requirements. This is expected to cut down transaction time and make it easier for importers to conduct trade in the Philippines.

TRADE provided extensive assistance to the BoC in developing the list, particularly in gathering data and coordinating with agencies tasked to regulate imported goods such as chemical, food, plant and animal products, among others. TRADE also organized a series of discussions attended by representatives from over 50 regulatory agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, Bureau of Animal Industries, Bureau of Plant Industries, Bureau of Investments, Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority and the National Food Authority who presented their respective agency's requirements, as well as the various legal bases for regulating specific commodities.

The Regulated Imports List will be added to the content of the National Trade Repository, a web-based source of comprehensive, up-to-date information on tariff and non-tariff measures for goods entering, exiting and transiting through the country, and a requirement in the ASEAN Economic Community.

The list will be strictly enforced starting 20 April 2015, after a brief period during which concerned agencies and the general public are invited to give their feedback, in order to allow the BoC and TRADE to further refine the list. It is now available to the public for downloading from the BoC website at <http://customs.gov.ph>.



The Bureau of Customs' Regulated Imports List will reduce potential confusion on required permits and clearances, and simplifies import transactions. (Photo courtesy of the BoC.)

APEC aims for greater SME participation



The first APEC Subcommittee on Standards and Conformance (SCSCI) meeting, chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry's Bureau of Public Standards (DTI-BPS), was held at the Clark Freeport Zone. TRADE provided technical support to DTI-BPS in preparing for the meeting where a key issue discussed was the need to set appropriate labelling requirements, to foster SME participation in regional and global markets and ease their products' entry into the APEC markets.

Rules and regulations vary widely between APEC economies, and between importers and distributors. The SCSCI's work towards harmonizing standards and conformance is in support of APEC's goal of trade and investment liberalization and facilitation.

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