THE TIR CUSTOMS TRANSIT SYSTEM

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Anyone who has ever travelled on European roads will recognize the familiar blue and white TIR plate carried by thousands of lorries and semi-trailers using the TIR Customs transit system. For the driver, the transport operator and the shipper, this plate stands for fast and efficient international transportation by road.

With over 50 countries using the procedure, the TIR system is the only truly international Customs transit system currently available. In common with other Customs transit procedures, the TIR procedure enables goods to move under Customs control across international borders without the payment of the duties and taxes that would normally be due at importation (or exportation). A condition of the TIR procedure is that the movement of the goods must include transport by road.

Goods move from a Customs office of departure in one country to a Customs office of destination in another country under cover of an internationally accepted Customs transit document, the TIR carnet, which also provides a financial guarantee for the payment of the suspended duties and taxes. The guarantee system is managed by an international organisation, which is currently the International Road Transport Union.

A Review Conference convened in November 1975 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) produced the TIR Convention of 1975 that came into force in 1978. Since that time the TIR Convention has proved that it is one of the most successful international transport conventions and is in fact so far the only universal Customs transit system in existence. The idea behind the TIR Convention and its transit regime has formed the basis for many regional transit systems and has thus, directly and indirectly, contributed to the facilitation of international transport, especially international road transport, not only in Europe and the Middle East, but also in other parts of the world, such as Africa and Latin America.

The experience gained in the first 10 to 15 years of operating the system was thus used to make the TIR system more efficient, less complex and at the same time more Customs secure.

Customs transit systems are devised to facilitate to the greatest possible extent the movement of goods under Customs seals in international trade and to provide the required Customs security and guarantees. For such a system to function satisfactorily, it is essential that any formalities involved are neither too burdensome for the Customs officials nor too complex for the transport operators and their agents. Therefore, a balance needs to be struck between the

requirements of the Customs authorities on the one hand and those of the transport operators on the other. Traditionally when goods crossed the territory of one or more States in the course of an international transport of goods by road, the Customs authorities in each State applied national controls and procedures. These varied from State to State, but frequently involved the inspection of the load at each national frontier and the imposition of national security requirements (guarantee, bond, deposit of duty, etc.) to cover the potential duties and taxes at risk while the goods were in transit through each territory. These measures, applied in each country of transit, led to considerable expenses, delays and interferences with international transport. In an attempt to reduce these difficulties experienced by transport operators and, at the same time, to offer Customs administrations an international system of control replacing traditional national procedures, whilst effectively protecting the revenue of each State through which goods were carried, the TIR system was devised.

As regards Customs control measures at frontiers, the TIR system clearly has advantages for Customs administrations as it reduces the normal requirements of national transit procedures. At the same time the system avoids the need – expensive in manpower and facilities – for physical inspection in countries of transit other than checking seals and the external conditions of the load compartment or container. It also dispenses with the need to operate national guarantees and national systems of documentation.

In addition, advantages arise from the fact that the international transit operation is covered by a single transit document, the TIR Carnet, which reduces the risk of presenting inaccurate information to Customs administrations.

The advantages of the TIR Convention to commerce and to transport interests are also obvious. Goods may travel across national frontiers with a minimum of interference by Customs administrations. By easing traditional impediments to the international movement of goods, the TIR system encourages the development of international trade. By reducing delays in transit, it enables significant economies to be made in transport costs.

Finally, in reducing the impediments to international traffic by road caused by Customs controls, it enables exporters and importers to select more easily the form of transport most suitable for their needs.

The TIR system, created more than 50 years ago and the TIR Convention, have proved to be a very effective international Customs transit system and have played an important role in facilitating international trade and transport, primarily within Europe, but more recently also between Europe and neighbouring areas. To date, it has 65 Contracting Parties, including the European Community, (Belarus joined in 1993). It covers the whole of Europe and

reaches out to North Africa and the Near and Middle East. Countries in Asia have been informed about the facilities of this global Customs transit system and their interest has shown that they may well join the TIR Convention in the not too distant future.

With the rapid increase of East-West European traffic and with the emergence of many newly independent countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the TIR system is today faced with new and, to this extent, unprecedented challenges. At the same time Customs authorities are faced with an unparalleled amount of Customs fraud and smuggling as a result of changing political, economic and social situations in many countries in the region and due to often heavily increasing Customs duties and taxes.

The United Nations, as a universal organization, is the depositary of the TIR Convention and provides the framework and the services to administer and, where necessary, adapt the TIR Convention to changing requirements. Past experience has shown that the TIR Convention, as part of the transport facilitation work undertaken within the UNECE, has served the interests of all concerned, Customs authorities and transport operators alike, and there is every reason to believe that it will continue to do so in the future.

TRAFFICKING IN WOMAN AS A FORM OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

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Trafficking in persons is an increasing problem that involves both sexual exploitation and labor exploitation of its victims. Trafficking affects all regions and the majority of countries in the world. The broad term "trafficking in women" encompasses a number of illegal actions, including transnational crime, illegal immigration and violations of labor standards. Trafficking in women is a complicated phenomenon with many forces that affect women's decisions to work abroad. Perhaps the strongest factor is the desperate economic situation, which impacts the availability of satisfactory employment in many countries for women more severely than men. Traffickers prey on women's vulnerable circumstances and may lure them into crime networks through deceit and false promises of decent working conditions and fair pay. Under international law, governments are obligated to protect their citizens from being trafficked, through programs that aim at prevention and the protection of victims. Prevention of trafficking in women requires examining the factors that contribute to the problem as well as providing education to potential victims. Both government and non-governmental programs should identify women who are at-risk for trafficking and provide them with the tools neces-