

**Minister of State, Honourable Dr. Norman Dunn, MP**

Greetings

**Jamaica Customs Agency Annual Virtual Church Service**

**Sunday, January 23, 2022; 10:00 a.m. [Join by 9:50 a.m.]**

In recognition of **International Customs Day 2022** (being celebrated on Wednesday, January 26)

Theme: **“Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem.”**

Salutations:

Moderators, Mrs. Antoinette Whitley Scott and Mr. James Grant

Honourable Ministers of Government

Commissioner of Customs, Mrs. Velma Ricketts Walker

Heads of Public Sector Departments and Agencies

Representatives of key stakeholder Private Sector & Umbrella Organizations

Rev. Cassell Dunkley, Director, Investigation, and our Preacher for today’s service

Members of the media

Directors and Staff of the Jamaica Customs Agency

Ladies and Gentlemen all

Good morning

It is my very special privilege to join you, Commissioner Ricketts Walker, and your team of dedicated Customs Officers and support personnel, as you commemorate **International Customs Day 2022**.

Though we continue to be, for the most part, physically apart as we navigate Covid-19 and the evolving strains associated with this virus, I am grateful that we can join in fellowship in this virtual space. I appreciate being part of your worship experience today.

Commissioner, we are here to celebrate your agency and the critical work that you undertake on behalf of all the citizens of this our beloved Jamaica, in protecting our borders, and essentially, our people and their health and safety.

Let me pause though, to offer my sincere condolence to you and your team, as I am aware of the sudden passing of two of your officers in quick succession over the last week. And even yesterday, you would have had to come to terms with the passing of a third colleague, after a period of illness. Death’s sting is not easily soothed. Though you work across many locations, I know that the JCA, as a close-knit organization, is deeply saddened at the loss of your colleagues and friends.

As we look to celebrate International Customs Day on Wednesday this week, the World Customs Organization (WCO) offers all of us a challenge through the theme - **“Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem.”** The challenge is three-pronged:

- Scale up
- Embrace
- Build

True, Covid-19 has brought untold hardships across the world, but it is an ill wind that blows no good. The onset of this disease and its many nuances over the last 24 months have spurred you to scale up and build a data ecosystem of which you can justifiably be proud. We have had to move decisively to engage with technology that we previously viewed as optional – look at the very way that we are worshipping today. Even as the Government of Jamaica was ensuring health and safety during these months, we have had to initiate ways to allow our business processes to be effective and ensure efficiency in dealing with our stakeholders. Simply put, we have had to **scale up**.

The theme, as a call to action, demands that we enhance how we do business. You have already made quantum leaps to reflect what is being undertaken by first world countries with far greater resources than us.

I commend you for the digital initiatives already implemented that are enabling the public sector to serve better – for example, the Jamaica Single Window for Trade (JSWIFT) - a collaboration with our Border Regulatory Agencies (BRAs) - that creates a single ecosystem which is improving trade locally and internationally.

JSWIFT is an important step in the right direction, as this single access point allows for submitting applications for Licences, Permits, Certificates and other regulatory requirements (LPCO); for uploading supporting documentation, for tracking transactions, electronic payments and real time notifications. The Trade Board Limited, an agency of the MIIC, has already been onboarded to JSWIFT, allowing us to quickly and efficiently process electronic certificates of origin; import and export licences for motor vehicles, machines and other related commodities; as well as import and export permits for certain commodities.

I also commend you for the improvements to the ASYCUDA system. Here again, two agencies of MIIC - JAMPRO and the Department of Cooperatives and Friendly Societies - have taken advantage of the facility to up the ante to improve the ease of doing business.

I know there are plans to significantly increase the number of government agencies which are part of JSWIFT and ASYCUDA – Pesticides Authority from the Ministry of Health; Veterinary Services Division to obtain Export Phytosanitary and Fumigation Certificates at the Ministry of Agriculture; Hazardous Substance Regulatory Authority, again from my Ministry, as well as another 12 Agencies in Phase 2 of the project to fully digitize services related to cross-border trade for Border Regulatory Agencies.

Implementing all of this, while the world battles a raging pandemic, speaks to the visionary leadership and committed team at the Customs Agency.

All of these digital systems together have been supporting how you collect and safeguard duties; how you control the flow of goods and people; and importantly, how you secure cross-border trade. This, Commissioner, is demonstrating the Agency's support of this Government's strategic plan as we seek to achieve Vision 2030.

Though we are experiencing challenging times, the Government of Jamaica has expended significant resources to cushion the effects of the pandemic. Your efforts demonstrate your commitment to help us do this.

Finally, I urge you, Commissioner and Customs Officers, to never lose sight of the Agency's mission, and possibly even more important, to always remember to uphold the Code of Conduct which guides your operations. You, Customs Officers, have been placed in a critical area of service. There are high expectations of you and I charge you to maintain the highest standards of integrity in your duties. As you serve the public and the business community; and as you work alongside other public sector employees, your integrity must be your watchword. It can never be compromised.

As we join you in acknowledging International Customs Day 2022, I reiterate the appreciation of the Government and people of Jamaica for the valiant work that you do every day to keep our borders safe and to improve the ease of doing business.

May God Almighty bless us all, as you continue to serve.