



Summary Report on the Americas Partnership Public – Private Dialogue on Trade Facilitation APEP 2024

I. Introduction

The Americas Partnership Public – Private Dialogue on Trade Facilitation took place on July 24-25, 2024, at the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, Colombia. This event brought together public and private sector representatives from APEP member countries, including customs authorities, trade experts, and representatives from multinational companies.

As a follow-up to the East Room Declaration released by the Leaders of APEP member countries in 2023, Chile and the United States co-led a project to advance the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The TFA aims to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of cross-border trade in goods, and foster cooperation between customs and other relevant authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance.

The main objective of the event was to create a Regional Trade Facilitation Experts Network aimed at enhancing regional collaboration and gaining a deeper understanding of the existing needs and challenges faced by APEP members around trade facilitation. The event aimed to foster dialogue and knowledge exchange among public and private sector stakeholders from APEP countries, focusing on border agency cooperation, single window, and pre-arrival processing.

The summary below generally describes the discussion among the participants. It is intended to further dialogue on these issues and does not represent official policy positions of the Americas Partnership or its participants.

II. Summary of the Discussion

Day 1:

Opening Remarks:

Mr. Luis Felipe Quintero Suárez, Vice-Minister of Foreign Trade of Colombia:

Vice-Minister Quintero welcomed the participants expressing gratitude for their presence and emphasizing the importance of joining efforts to advance the digitalization of foreign trade. The Vice-Minister also highlighted the significance of interoperability between single window systems, risk management systems, and border coordination to ensure that the exchange of goods is secure, efficient, and expedient, while preventing the trafficking of drugs and arms. The Vice-Minister further emphasized the importance of the forum as a platform for the integration of authorities, noting its relevance in enhancing the competitiveness of foreign investments and its potential to foster the creation of global value chains in the region.



Ms. Courtney Smothers, Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for the Western Hemisphere:

Ms. Smothers conveyed the significance of the dialogue within the framework of the East Room Declaration and the upcoming Trade Ministers meeting in Quito, where discussions also cover issues related to SMEs and environmental sustainability, aimed at creating a fair, equitable, and sustainable trade framework.

Ms. Smothers highlighted Latin America's leadership during the negotiation of the TFA, where the private sector and customs officials were actively involved. The creation of the Global Alliance and its work on technical assistance were also noted as crucial supports for this initiative. Ms. Smothers emphasized the need to adapt the provisions of the TFA, showcasing how it offers an opportunity to identify best practices and provide data to generate ideas and recommendations, ensuring that APEP economies continue to lead on trade facilitation issues.

Rafael Fernando Marín Kohan, Head for North America, Central America, and the Caribbean, SUBREI, Chile:

Mr. Marín highlighted Chile's active participation in APEP since 2022 as part of an initiative aimed at equalizing the tools and capacities of different countries in the Americas, ensuring that all nations can participate in international trade on equal terms and equitably benefit from it. These values strongly align with Chile's values, where an inclusive and sustainable trade policy is promoted, grounded in a foreign policy committed to openness, cooperation, and the pursuit of agreements based on common efforts.

Mr. Marín further noted that APEP has become a key mechanism for dialogue on issues of great interest, while efforts have been made to generate regional discussions, APEP now offers a common platform for exchanging views on trade and economic priorities identified by its members. Likewise, Mr. Marín added that the exchange of experiences and capacities within APEP are essential, especially as members are at different stages of development, these opportunities are fundamental for strengthening regional ties and jointly advancing common interests for the prosperity of the Americas.

Ms. Mónica Conde, Vice-President International Relations of Bogotá Chamber of Commerce:

Ms. Conde stressed the importance of a favorable institutional framework for business generation, essential for facilitating agile trade exchanges and supporting the swift movement of goods. Ms. Conde highlighted several initiatives focused on transparency and sustainability for MSMEs, as well as intellectual property rights (IPR) training aimed at enabling comprehensive internationalization for Colombian businesses. Additionally, she noted the efforts that have been made in electronic commerce.

Ms. Conde added that the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce is actively advancing transparency programs for MSMEs, providing business and IPR training for Colombian enterprises, and assisting the Ministry of Trade in regulatory development.



Session 1: Border Agency Cooperation

Mr. Peter Swartz, Co-Founder and Chief Science Officer, Altana:

Mr. Swartz discussed the impact of geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, policy changes, and insecurity on global supply chains. Mr. Swartz highlighted the significant role that artificial intelligence (AI) can play in improving global trade by enhancing the speed of transactions, protecting data, and ensuring compliance with regulations. The Co-Founder of Altana emphasized how AI technologies are enabling Customs, logistics companies, and multinational corporations to manage and collaborate across complex global systems at scale. This includes managing cross-border flows, reducing transit times, and increasing efficiency in areas such as environmental regulation and human rights enforcement.

Mr. Swartz elaborated on the benefits of privacy-preserving technologies, which allow coordination across borders without sharing sensitive data. These technologies help create a shared understanding of value chains, enabling both the public and private sectors to act on a unified source of truth. This collaboration results in better management of the trillions of dollars in cross-border flows, increasing economic growth, revenue collection, and reducing illicit activities such as narcotics trafficking and money laundering.

Ms. Leah R. Liston, Director for Customs and Trade Affairs, U.S. Trade Representative:

Director Liston discussed the essential role of border agency cooperation in establishing effective single windows and emphasized the importance of interagency collaboration. Ms. Liston highlighted that one of the first initiatives of the Americas Partnership Trade Track focuses on best practices in implementing the TFA. While each commitment under the TFA is distinct, they are most effective when integrated to create a modern, fully functioning customs system.

Ms. Liston underscored that when the Americas Partnership prioritized topics such as Border Agency Cooperation, Single Window, and Pre-arrival Processing for its first Public – Private Dialogue on Trade Facilitation, it brought together a set of TFA commitments that, when implemented collectively, generate outcomes greater than the sum of their individual parts. She referenced Article 8 on Border Agency Cooperation, Article 9.4 on Single Window, and Article 7.1 on Pre-Arrival Processing, along with Articles 7.4 on Risk Management and 7.5 on Post-Clearance Audit, noting that these components enable border agencies to work collaboratively. Access to a functioning Single Window allows for risk assessment as soon as data is submitted, giving agencies the time to perform safety, security, and compliance checks before the goods arrive.

Ultimately, this integration allows agencies to feed their decisions back into the Single Window, providing a whole-of-government determination on whether goods can be released upon arrival or must be held. Liston emphasized that this framework, when fully implemented, offers one of the most efficient and effective customs clearance processes available. However, it requires the seamless functioning of all commitments. If any aspect is lacking, it can affect the entire process. She also noted that incorporating border agency cooperation into the Single Window, alongside pre-arrival



processing, facilitates more reliable risk management. Automated risk management systems, flexible data submission timeframes, and the ability to make corrections encourages traders to submit data sooner, ultimately improving risk management and the overall efficiency of the Single Window. By weaving these TFA commitments together, trade facilitation is exponentially enhanced.

Dr. Claudia I. Avila Connelly, General Director of Customs Service and International Affairs, ANAM, Mexico:

ANAM's Dr. Avila emphasized the important role ANAM plays in enforcing the law, guaranteeing the continuity and predictability of trade, focusing mainly on modernizing its customs, creating dynamic and intelligent borders, reinforcing trade facilitation and security. For the ANAM, the integrated management of its borders consists of having a single and shared physical infrastructure where neighboring countries operate jointly, resulting in the simplification of border crossing processes, promoting international cooperation and the exchange of information in order to strengthen trade facilitation and improve border security.

Under the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (USMCA), specifically Article 7.23, which refers to trade facilitation initiatives, ANAM shares best practices in the implementation of customs procedures, reaffirms its commitment to matters related to cross-border operations, harmonizes and implements programs that contribute to trade facilitation between countries and strengthen the security and efficiency of the supply chain.

Mr. Fernando Vigil, Customs Specialist, Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism:

Mr. Vigil presented Peru's efforts to strengthen the AEO program and improve trade efficiency, providing an overview of the country's foreign trade and its implementation of the WTO TFA. Mr. Vigil emphasized that by 2024, Peruvian exports are expected to reach a historic high of \$66.195 billion, with 28% of these exports being non-traditional goods. Mr. Vigil noted that, according to the WTO TFA Database, Peru has achieved a 97.1% implementation rate of the agreement. Two measures in Category C remain pending until 2026: Article 5.1: Notifications for enhanced controls or inspections and Article 5.3: Testing procedures.

Regarding to the AEO Program, a presentation was made on the Expanded AEO, also called Sanitary AEO, a project developed as part of the activities of Component 2 of the Initiative "Improvement of Sanitary Control Management in the Framework of the Trade Facilitation Agreement in Peru".

Mr. Vigil highlighted that this program aims to incorporate sanitary control entities, such as SENASA (agricultural sector), DIGESA (environmental health), and SANIPES (fisheries), into the AEO framework, allowing the intervening operators (exporters and importers), who comply with certain sanitary requirements, to access preferential and simplified treatment in sanitary controls, inspections and administrative processes, and also to capacity-building opportunities and faster access to health certifications.



Mr. Vigil indicated that the Sanitary AEO is integrated with the Peruvian Single Window (VUCE), which allows importers and exporters to manage their sanitary and customs procedures electronically and centrally.

The program also leverages cross-border cooperation with the United States under the FTA and other international frameworks, building on successful models from countries like the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and the UAE. The legal framework supporting this initiative includes various national decrees and laws, such as Supreme Decree No. 267-2020-EF, which outlines the necessary measures and exceptions for the AEO program, including those related to national security and sanitary risks.

Panel Discussion on Border Agency Cooperation:

The panel first addressed the successes and challenges of border agency cooperation, Ms. Paola Buendía (ANDI, Colombia) underscored that interoperability among agencies must be central to these efforts and must be fully functional, not merely symbolic, and that digitalization should eliminate the need for traders to submit hard copies of documents already provided in digital form. Additionally, data exchanges between agencies involved in a single window should be seamless and automatic. The same applies to AEO interoperability, which, while present in the Andean region due to issues like drug trafficking and illicit trade, needs to produce tangible results at the border.

Ms. Isabel Clavijo (AmCham Mexico) highlighted that Mexico's greatest successes in border agency cooperation have come through initiatives involving private sector participation, notably the U.S.-Mexico CEO Dialogue, the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC), and the trusted trader programs. Mexico has also participated in the U.S. Customs' COAC (Customs Operations Advisory Committee). In these instances, success is attributed to the delivery of tangible results for users. Ms. Clavijo illustrated this point with the case of avocado exports, where U.S. FDA officers are stationed at packing plants in Mexican states like Jalisco, enabling 80% of Mexican avocados to enter the U.S. with very few physical inspections at the border. However, challenges remain, including concerns over border closures and the fact that the NTFC has only convened twice in the last six years.

For Ms. Vada Garcia (CTA, United States), border agency cooperation is essential, as her association's members already face considerable challenges navigating complex documentary compliance requirements. The extra costs caused by duplication or conflicting regulations only exacerbate these difficulties. Representing a consumer technology association primarily made up of small- and medium-sized businesses, Garcia emphasized that while digitalization is critical, it is not enough to ensure that companies can fully capitalize on nearshoring and other supply chain opportunities. The biggest beneficiaries of border agency cooperation are indeed the micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

The discussion also revealed conditions under which border agency cooperation works effectively. In the case of Mexican avocado exports, cooperation is driven by the strong demand for the product, which in turn focuses attention on finding solutions and fostering innovation. Similarly, NTFCs succeed when there is political commitment to create accountability, establish clear protocols, and



assign authorities for information sharing. Customs often lead NTFCs, but they lack the authority to compel other agencies to share data, which hampers cooperation. Some agencies are outright unwilling to share information or collaborate with others at the border.

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) noted the widening gap between the intentions and realities of these discussions. While countries sign ambitious international agreements, these agreements often do not provide clear priorities for Customs. Despite frequent calls from both government and the private sector for increased data sharing, privacy concerns make this difficult in practice. Additionally, while the private sector demands improvements from Customs, these requests are often made without a clear set of focused priorities. As a result, many trade facilitation and cooperation agreements remain unimplemented, as they often affect tax and tariff collection, leading Customs to prioritize revenue generation over cooperation and trade efficiency.

The conversation then shifted to the role of single windows in border agency cooperation, particularly in relation to NTFCs. For countries like Costa Rica and Peru, the single window serves as the mechanism through which border agency cooperation occurs. However, private sector engagement typically happens through the NTFC, as emphasized by representatives from Colombia and Peru. In cases like Costa Rica, the number of agencies participating in the single window exceeds those involved in the NTFC. Having legal mandates for the establishment and operation of NTFCs enhances their ability to ensure cooperation and coordination among agencies.



Session 2: Single Windows

Ms. Isabel Mejia Rivas, Trade and Investment Lead Specialist in the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB):

Ms. Mejias highlighted the global context of trade single windows (SWs) and their pivotal role in reducing trade costs and improving efficiency. Ms. Mejia emphasized that Latin America is at a crucial juncture. The region stands to benefit from nearshoring investments and realignments of global supply chains, yet its trade infrastructure and high trade costs continue to present significant obstacles. On average, trade costs in Latin America account for nearly 20% of production costs, according to some estimates.

Investing in SWs, particularly enhancing interoperability among existing systems, can make a substantial impact in reducing these costs. Global data suggest that countries with operational SWs experience a 23% increase in exports, with gains rising to 37% when both the importing and exporting countries have such systems in place.

Latin America has made significant progress in SW implementation, evolving from having no systems in 1994 to almost all countries in the region operating one by 2024. However, the scope and sophistication of these systems vary, influenced by factors such as political will, interagency cooperation, stakeholder engagement, regulatory frameworks, and technological infrastructure. Among the more advanced initiatives is the Pacific Alliance SW Interoperability Project, where member countries (Pacific Alliance plus Uruguay) have harmonized and exchanged key documents, including e-Phyto, certificate of origin, customs declaration, and zoo-sanitary certificates. This project has facilitated approximately 120,000 transactions through interconnected platforms, with real-time data exchanged before goods arrive. The savings have been significant, with \$1.9 million saved on e-Phytos alone—a figure projected to reach \$30 million if all Latin American e-Phytos were interconnected.

Ms. Mejia also emphasized that the next frontier for Latin American SWs lies in full interoperability. The benefits are clear: cost reductions in document management and time savings in goods clearance at borders. Moreover, the design of interoperability can drive further digitalization of documentary requirements, modernization of regulatory frameworks, and enhancement of SWs' scope and performance. As SWs continue to evolve, the technology supporting interoperability can create a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement.

The IADB is developing a tool to facilitate regional SW interoperability, not by harmonizing data—an unrealistic goal—but by translating data elements between countries. The success of this tool will depend on the governance structure and the political commitment to regional interoperability, a challenge similar to those faced by national governments in managing their own SWs.



Mr. Marvin Rodríguez, Trade & Investment Facilitation Manager, Promotora de Comercio Exterior de Costa Rica (PROCOMER), Costa Rica:

Mr. Rodríguez discussed the evolution and achievements of Costa Rica's single window system (VUCE), one of the three key pillars of PROCOMER's trade facilitation strategy—the other two being the special free zone regimes and the single investment window. These pillars are interrelated, with the VUCE playing a central role in streamlining and unifying border compliance procedures and requirements. Managed by a public-private partnership (not by Costa Rica's Customs, though fully integrated with it), the VUCE was developed in collaboration with the private sector following a significant revision of trade processes in the late 1990s. This partnership ensures that the system responds to both security needs and business efficiency demands, which has become an integral part of Costa Rica's customs compliance culture.

Mr. Rodríguez emphasized that the VUCE's functionality directly influences foreign investment in Costa Rica, as the ease with which goods can be exported is critical for attracting investments. The system, now in its second version, is highly comprehensive and sophisticated. It is fully interoperable with ten other national agencies' data management systems and international frameworks like the IPPC's e-Phyto. The VUCE handles over 400,000 processes annually, with 56% of those processes being automated. Currently, a VUCE 3.0 is under development, which is expected to increase the number of automated procedures by 35%, integrate pre-clearance procedures such as certificates of origin and importer registration, and place risk management at the core of border assessments and some automated processes.

Ms. Rosario Del Castillo, Head of the National Committee on Trade Facilitation, Dominican Republic:

Ms. Del Castillo discussed the significant improvements to the Dominican SW, driven by a new customs modernization law recently approved. Central to these improvements is the 24-hour cargo release mandate, part of an ambitious digital modernization and integration effort across various border agencies aimed at streamlining customs compliance and enhancing the user experience. Key features of this modernization include the expansion of VUCE coverage to 44 agencies and 298 services, 188 simplified services, integrated electronic payments, process automation, correction modules within the VUCE, and two-way communication between customs and users to continuously improve the system.

With the 24-hour cargo release system being implemented, Dominican Customs now expects to move over 64,000 containers in a fraction of the time—reducing processing from 4-5 days to under 24 hours. Importantly, 78% of the importers benefiting from the 24-hour release system are small and medium-sized businesses, underscoring the positive impact of this modernization effort on the broader business community.

Panel Discussion on Single Windows:

The panel discussion, moderated by Martín Gustavo Ibarra Pardo, Founder and Honorary President of the Free Zones Association of the Americas (AZFA), focused on the importance of single windows



in improving trade efficiency for both users and regulators throughout Latin America. Ibarra opened the conversation by noting that the region has a significant opportunity to expand exports and increase global competitiveness through the adoption of effective single window systems. However, apart from countries like Costa Rica, Chile, and Mexico, much of Latin America is not fully leveraging these systems to compete globally.

Ms. Laura Escalante from the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF) emphasized the clear benefits of single windows but suggested that countries should focus on continuous improvement programs rather than large-scale overhauls. These programs would allow for manageable, incremental updates that are more cost-effective and enable customs to integrate lessons learned into their operations. Escalante also underscored the importance of involving the private sector to provide user experience insights, helping customs prioritize automation and system improvements. She highlighted that customs agencies should not just duplicate outdated, paper-based processes, but adopt digital technologies that are backed by cost-benefit analyses.

Ms. Olga Constanza López from United Parcel Service (UPS) pointed to a key challenge: express courier and postal companies are often excluded from the benefits of single window systems. This exclusion creates disadvantages for companies involved in the rapidly growing e-commerce sector, especially in countries like Colombia. López proposed that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) develop a "VUCE for Express" to address this gap and create broader public benefit across the region. Escalante echoed that data-sharing and transparency among government agencies are often hindered by internal resistance, limiting the effectiveness of single windows.

The discussion also addressed the integration of risk management into single window systems. Chilean customs argued that risk management should remain a separate governmental function, while Mexican customs see the single window as a tool for managing information used by various agencies for risk assessments. Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, the single window facilitates coordination with risk protocols but does not directly manage them.

Peru has incorporated artificial intelligence into its single window system to enhance risk detection and cargo assessment. In Costa Rica, the single window is managed by a non-governmental agency, but depends on the government for risk assessment under the "National System of Risk." In Uruguay, a dedicated government agency, Uruguay XXI, manages the single window and collects data for each agency that regulates trade in goods. Each agency then controls its own risk assessments using data provided by the single window. This results in a high level of inter-agency coordination, supported by private sector collaboration to identify and reform bottlenecks.



Session 3: Pre-arrival Processing

Mr. Christian Gómez, Senior Director of Trade Compliance, Walmart:

Mr. Gómez highlighted Walmart's collaboration with customs authorities as essential for ensuring compliance and managing its vast global supply chain. With over 10,500 stores across 19 countries and sourcing from more than 70 countries, Walmart's engagement with customs agencies is critical not only for operational efficiency but also as part of its commitment to the rule of law.

A central aspect of this collaboration is pre-arrival processing. Gómez noted that 98% of Walmart's imported products into the United States are pre-cleared before arriving at the port of entry. This process allows Walmart to manage supply chain disruptions by working closely with customs to prioritize cargo entries based on their estimated time of arrival and the criticality of the shipments. Even in cases of port diversions, Walmart's Trade Compliance team ensures that all clearance procedures are completed before the cargo arrives at the new or designated port.

Walmart's collaboration with U.S. Customs also helps navigate an increasingly complex compliance environment, including new regulations from the USDA (organics), EPA, and FDA, as well as adherence to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), Russia sanctions, and changing tariffs on trade with China. Walmart's supplier onboarding process is managed through its Retail Link portal, where suppliers provide customs compliance data and documentation. The information is reviewed by Walmart's classification and admissibility team to ensure compliance with partner government agency regulations, enabling Walmart to tightly manage its supply chain while quickly responding to both customs requirements and supply chain disruptions.

Ms. Ana Laura Suárez, Head of the Processes and Facilitation Division, National Customs Directorate, Uruguay:

Ms. Suárez discussed Uruguay's pre-arrival processing system, which allows all customs declarations and duties to be processed before merchandise arrives at port. This system is part of a broader effort by Uruguay Customs to eliminate paper-based processes, a transformation that began in 2010 in collaboration with the private sector.

The pre-arrival processing system, introduced in 2016 alongside Uruguay's single window and authorized economic operator programs, allows importers to submit customs declarations up to 30 days before the arrival of goods. Additionally, corrections to these declarations can be made up to eight days after finalization.

Ms. Suárez explained that the process is similar for both sea and air cargo. The freight is first assigned an identification number, which is used to request a lane for customs clearance. The cargo manifest must be submitted 72 hours before the goods arrive. The introduction of this system has significantly enhanced the efficiency of Uruguay's customs processes, reduced delays and facilitating smoother trade operations.



Ms. Karina Castillo, Head of Customs Regulation Department, National Customs Service, Chile: Ms. Castillo discussed Chile's advancements in electronic submissions for goods and pre-arrival processing, focusing on the critical role of these processes in improving trade efficiency and compliance. Chile's pre-arrival system allows customs declarations to be submitted before goods arrive at the port of entry. This initiative, which began in 2010 as part of a broader paperless customs process, enables the submission of declarations up to 30 days in advance and includes the ability to make corrections up to eight days after submission.

Ms. Castillo emphasized that the system is designed to facilitate seamless cargo handling across various transportation modes, including maritime, air, and courier services. The system's electronic manifest functionality has significantly streamlined customs operations by enabling real-time data sharing between stakeholders such as freight forwarders, customs brokers, and port operators. The process improves cargo clearance times, contributing to the efficiency of Chile's supply chain management, and supporting efforts to modernize customs procedures in line with international trade facilitation agreements.

Panel Discussion on Pre-arrival Processing:

The panel began with a discussion on how efficiency tools, such as pre-arrival processing, impact the bottom line for key industries. Mr. Pierre Bouchet, representing DollarCity, a medium-sized retailer whose most expensive product costs \$4, shared the company's experience with pre-arrival processing. Bouchet emphasized that initiatives like these are crucial for lowering the cost of moving goods across borders, which ultimately allows companies to pass the savings on to consumers. To this end, DollarCity has developed a dedicated customs compliance unit that focuses on promoting and testing trade facilitation measures, including pre-arrival processing. Bouchet highlighted their engagement in a pilot project in Colombia, which has already saved the company \$200 per container.

Ms. Yovaneska Eslava, representing CLADEC, discussed the implementation challenges surrounding pre-arrival processing in the express industry. She noted that while regulations like pre-arrival processing can benefit express companies by improving efficiency, the way these regulations are issued often complicates compliance because they are not designed with express in mind. In the case of Colombia, Customs requires advance data for imported merchandise, which includes prior classification of low-risk goods. However, the lack of proper training for importers and a grace period in the sanction's regime means express companies often end up paying the penalties for late filing. Eslava explained that this regulatory gap forces express businesses to delay implementation of what could otherwise be a cost-saving measure, due to the risk of incurring sanctions for non-compliance.

Mr. Diego Rengifo, representing ANALDEX Colombia, elaborated on the state of pre-arrival processing in Colombia, highlighting the challenges in its implementation. According to a regional survey conducted by ANALDEX, 65% of traders were unaware that pre-arrival declaration had been mandated by Colombia's Customs Administration, while only 12% knew of the mechanism and found it useful. Another 3% used it but did not see its value. Rengifo emphasized that the issue lies not with



the pre-arrival declaration itself but with its implementation and the lack of a compelling business case. He recommended that risk management processes be better integrated into pre-arrival procedures, leveraging technology to ensure data systems are interoperable. Rengifo concluded by advocating for active results measurement and the sharing of such data with the private sector to foster reciprocity and transparency in customs processes.

Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay added additional information about their pre-arrival processing systems. Some systems are mandatory, but most are voluntary. Some are starting as pilots and some are specific to trusted traders. One good example comes from Costa Rica where, in general, the advance cargo declaration is voluntary. However, as part of the Border Integration Program in the modernization of the border crossing between Costa Rica and Panama, the advance cargo declaration is required on a mandatory basis to reduce processing times. Many stakeholders, including DollarCity, cited the need for close coordination between customs and the private sector users of the system for its success.

Almost all systems allow the submitter to correct the data filed pre-arrival after release of the goods. In Canada, corrections can be made up to one-month post-release. Having the opportunity to correct submissions once better data is available makes traders more comfortable submitting early. Many of the countries mitigate their fines, penalties or sanctions for late or incorrect data. This engenders trust between traders and customs. Uruguay allows traders to explain the reason for delayed data submissions before sanctions are imposed. Fines for errors in Ecuador are kept low to encourage the use of its corrections tool. And, the United States imposes no penalties for mistakes which are voluntarily disclosed before customs discovers them. Canada credits its ability to clear goods within minutes on having created a market for trust where agents that cheat on their data submissions lose customers.



Day 2:

Session 4: Next Steps for APEP CTRT

This session provided a recap of key takeaways from the conference and focused on outlining the path forward for the Americas Partnership Committee on Trade and Regulatory Transparency (CTRT). The discussions explored how APEP CTRT can leverage the insights and recommendations from the breakout sessions and other conference presentations to move forward with concrete actions, projects, and collaborations.

It was clear from the discussion that this region is poised to gain the benefits of recent trends towards nearshoring and resiliency. Digitalization and coordination can help the region capitalize on these developments. In this context, the three topics of the dialogue are key: Border Agency Cooperation, Single Window development, and Pre-Arrival Processing. The Partnership countries are using electronic single windows, but not all of their border agencies are linked. Some agencies still need to wait until shipments arrive to gain the information they need to release goods from customs custody. If all agencies with responsibility at the border were linked together through each country's electronic Single Window, they could all benefit from single window data and automate their risk analysis. Many agencies are already using automated risk analysis, but not all are using customs data submitted through an electronic single window. And, even more of them cannot access and analyze customs data pre-arrival, i.e., before the goods arrive at the port-of-entry. The result is goods waiting at the border for risk analysis that is rushed and hastened. Furthermore, through our discussions we recognized that accurate data is unlikely to be submitted early unless the private-sector traders who provide the data trust the system. If not, they will wait until they have the assurances they need to submit their data, which can slow down economic activity. This is why a number of Partnership countries are using penalty mitigation, allowances for corrections, and open communication channels to encourage early data submissions. We have evidence of the benefits of pre-arrival processing directly from customs officials and from stakeholders. It leads to better risk assessment and faster clearance times. But, developing a pre-arrival system that includes all border agencies and uses effective digitalization mechanisms takes coordination with the private sector, with other government agencies (potentially through an NTFC), and with regional partners. And, it takes motivation. The Partners in the CTRT, through this Dialogue, and through follow-on projects, can help provide the motivation needed to develop and improve these systems and thereby take utmost advantage of recent trends to benefit the region to the fullest.

Session 5: Report on Breakout Session Discussions

Four roundtables were formed to discuss the following questions:

1. How do we encourage all border agencies to participate in our Single Windows?
2. How do we ensure that all agencies make a timely decision on release so that a decision can be made prior to arrival?
3. How do we digitize the process from start to finish (regardless of inspections/examinations)?



4. How do we encourage agencies to conduct their import inspections/examinations in parallel, rather than on a 1-for-1 basis?
5. How do we incorporate a correction/update mechanism?

Based on the questions, the breakout groups reported back the following:

First Group (Ecuador, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, AMCHAM):

The first group emphasized the need for regulatory frameworks to support trade facilitation through SWs. Key recommendations included establishing dedicated institutions with economic resources to facilitate integration into SWs and ensuring continuous improvement through a central coordinating body. They also highlighted the importance of inter-institutional agreements and process digitization that includes the transportation ministries. Additionally, campaigns to raise awareness and mechanisms for regular technology updates were seen as critical steps for successful implementation. The group stressed the need for mapping agency decision-making times to identify areas for improvement and for parallel inspections to be built into legal frameworks.

Second Group (Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico):

The second group identified five key steps to enhance both public and private sector support for Single Windows. They recommended launching a campaign to promote the benefits of SWs, which include improved revenue collection and reduced smuggling. They also recommended mapping stakeholders for collaboration and conducting a diagnostic assessment to identify best practices from existing SWs. Additionally, the group emphasized the importance of understanding digital platforms for interoperability and using a legal framework, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), to ensure smooth implementation. This legal framework would help avoid political entanglements while ensuring compliance with regulations.

Third Group (Barbados, USA, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Private Sector):

The third group highlighted the importance of legal mandates to compel agency participation in Single Windows and stressed the need for active private sector involvement. Building trust between the public and private sectors was identified as crucial for effective collaboration. The group recommended that governments provide incentives for private sector participation and suggested that agreements between agencies on risk thresholds and digitalization should form the foundation of interagency cooperation. The group also stressed the need for coordinated inspections, facilitated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems, and for low penalties to encourage participation.

Fourth Group – (Chile, Colombia, CTA, IADB):

The fourth group focused on the relationship between resources, political will, and effective communication in resolving regulatory issues related to Single Windows. They emphasized the need for harmonized inspections and the importance of making technology available and encouraging its use across the Americas to support these efforts. Additionally, the group discussed the importance of ensuring that business rules for pre-arrival processing are clear and that response times are coordinated



across agencies. They also highlighted the need for simultaneous inspections and transparent communication between users and agencies during the pre-arrival process.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Isabel Mejia Rivas invited the Partnership to do three things. First, make the best of the unique opportunity and energy the TF Private-Public Experts Dialogue provides because it is unique to see both political will and technical knowledge come together in this way. Second, work with the private sector, because ultimately the private sector is the “customer” of our customs agencies. Third, be honest, especially about what is working and what needs to change. Creating a compendium of best practices is a good place to start.

Mr. José Raúl Perales expressed GATF’s willingness to play a key role in this process, commenting that the GATF stands ready to serve as a vehicle for collecting and disseminating best practices, as well as supporting the development and implementation of trade facilitation policies across the region.

By acting as a repository of these policies and fostering greater collaboration, GATF can significantly enhance regional efforts. Its involvement will help ensure economies adopt compatible trade facilitation measures, improve the efficiency of Single Window systems, and promote transparency in customs processes. Through its technical expertise and resources, GATF will also facilitate capacity-building initiatives and provide much-needed support to ensure that these trade reforms are sustainable and effective.

The event served as a critical platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, fostering dialogue on innovative trade facilitation practices, and underscoring the importance of public-private collaboration. Participants identified clear priorities moving forward, including digitalization, public-private dialogue, and regional cooperation, which are essential to creating more efficient and connected trade systems. As the next steps take shape, implementing these recommendations will require dedicated resources, strong political commitment, and active engagement from both the public and private sectors.

The dialogue closed with commitment from both the public and private sectors to turning these discussions into concrete actions. The groundwork laid during this event provides a strong foundation for future collaboration.