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New Single Window Project to Test Ways for ASEAN to Speed Imports/Exports

Bali, November 18, 2011 – A new era of faster and more efficient trade among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) nations moved one step closer to reality early this month, when ASEAN officials agreed to launch a pilot project to test a regional system that could dramatically reduce the time needed to process import and export documents, potentially saving businesses and consumers in Southeast Asia millions of dollars.

Often referred to as a single window, the process will allow companies and traders to submit import, export, and transit data only once. This reduces clearance times significantly, as the documents are processed and cleared by multiple government agencies in a single, integrated process.

The project was featured in the Joint Statement issued by ASEAN heads of state and U.S. President Barak Obama here today, welcoming “the launch of the ASEAN Single Window pilot project to enable more efficient and secure trade within and with ASEAN.”

Over the next 12 months, the ASEAN Single Window (ASW) pilot project will test and perfect the process. Seven ASEAN nations will take part: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

When fully operational, it will enable officials throughout ASEAN to exchange customs declaration, preferential certificate of origin, and other trade and customs information through a single, shared, secure network architecture. The time saved is expected to be substantial. The World Bank’s Doing Business survey estimates that it takes Singapore, with its established single window, four days to process import documents and five days for export documents. By contrast, the other ASEAN nations average 22 days to process import documents and 19 days for exports.

The cost savings associated with the single window process are also expected to be significant. A World Bank analysis found that traders in the Republic of Korea saved \$2.1 billion annually in freight storage, inventory, labor, and paperwork after the country implemented its electronic single window.

The ASW Agreement was signed in 2005 with a goal of achieving customs cargo release time of 30 minutes by establishing National Single Windows (NSWs) by 2012, which could then be connected and integrated regionally. The seven-nation pilot program is the first step toward perfecting this process and making a region-wide ASW a reality.

While the pilot project is under way, Member States will consider whether other data, such as phyto-sanitary and veterinary certificates or commercial information like invoices and freight

papers, could also be exchanged through the ASW architecture. The region's private sector is expected to play an active role in those discussions.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of State have played an important role in promoting the ASW as part of ongoing U.S. Government assistance to help establish an ASEAN Economic Community and promote economic integration in Southeast Asia by 2015.

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