Liberia

Source: WCO/Department of Customs – Liberia Revenue Authority

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Measures aiming to facilitate the Cross-border Movement of Relief and Essential Supplies

Immediately the COVID-19 index case was announced in Liberia, the Government took a decisive decision to close all international borders to passengers, except for cargo and humanitarian supplies. In order to facilitate trade, Customs immediately introduced new measures to facilitate the exchange with neighboring countries, protect our staff and public against infection:

1. Measures aiming to Facilitate the Cross-border Movement of Relief and Essential Supplies

In the wake of COVID-19 and restrictions of cross- border movements of persons, a number of measures aimed at facilitating the cross-border movement of relief and essentials were taken:

1.1. Liberia Customs in coordination with other border agencies allows trucks and their drivers, coordinated by international aid agencies, to cross borders from neighbouring countries into Liberia for the purpose of delivering relief supplies, but with strict adherence to public health measures, including temperature screening and social distancing and definite timeframe for the return of the driver and the means of transport.

1.2. In the case of cross border movement of commercial but also essential goods to support the local population, Customs, in coordination with other border agencies, is still allowing the exchange of goods at land borders but with the following restrictions:

1.2a. Foreign truck drivers are allowed to transport and offload goods at the Customs facility at the border. The driver and any assistant are kept at an isolated point while the local consignees take delivery of goods using local means of transport. Trade is exchanged without allowing foreign persons to cross borders.

1.2b. As an alternatively measure, Customs, in coordination with other border agencies, has put in place a mechanism whereby trucks conveying goods are driven to borders by foreign drivers and exchange with local drivers for final conveyance to delivery point. During this process, foreign drivers are kept at isolation points and drivers cabins disinfected by health authorities at the border before being driven by local drivers. This measure has been particularly helpful for goods in transit from neighbouring countries.

1.3. A special release procedure, which is provided for by law to address emergencies, is being utilized for COVID-19 to release health supplies immediately on arrival while the clearance completed afterwards.

Remarks from the International Road Transport Union

Forthcoming

2. Measures aiming at Supporting the Economy and Sustaining Supply Chain Continuity
The Government of Liberia recognizes the need to keep the local economy alive while at the same time combating the spread of the virus. In this connection, Customs taken following measures: 2.1. While most Government offices remain closed and staffers sent on compulsory furlough, all Customs field and HQ offices remain opened to not facilitate the cross-border movement humanitarian goods, but to also support the local economy in terms of trade exchange.
3. Measures aiming at Protecting Customs administrations' Staff

Following the global outbreak of COVID-19, the following measures were taken incrementally by Liberia Customs:

3.1. Immediate distribution of face masks, hand sanitizers and disinfectants to all field offices including air, land and sea ports.

3.2. Once the index case was announced in Liberia, borders were closed by the Government. All Customs field offices were de-congested by fifty percent thereby giving paid vacation priority to all officers with pre-existing health conditions, female officers returning from maternity leaves, older officers, etc. This has allowed for border offices to remain opened at all times for trade while at the same time offices are de-congested enough for social distancing.

3.3. Customs HQ was de-congested by 80 percent when following the increased in cases at which time the President declared a state of emergency. This has essentially allowed all Customs offices to remain functional during the state of emergency while providing a safe working environment for duty all staff.

3.3. All officers are required to wear face mask at all times once they are out of their homes and on duty. At the same time there is a compulsory temperature screening requirement and use of face mask by members in order to access customs offices and/or facilities.

3.4. Physical interaction between Customs and the public has reduced through the introduction of electronic platforms for the exchange of information and for the granting of certain administrative approvals. Prior to COVID-19, 80 percent of customs transactions were already paperless, including the submission of supporting documents. This has minimized physical interaction between our officers and the public.

3.5. Customs management meetings are now electronic by means of Zoom or Google Duo platforms. Where the technology is not available, especially at remote border offices, customs meetings, of not more than 10 participants at a time, are held in opened-air with

officers keeping at least twelve feet apart. Participants of opened-air meetings are required to wear face mask through out the meetings.

3.6. Liberia Customs deems communication as a key priority during this health crisis. Hence, a platform was created to not only keep the staff updated on global, regional and national outlook in respect of COVID-19, but also to frequently keep staff reminded of the safety measures and hygiene requirements while at home and on duty.

4. Measures aiming at Protecting Society

While measures have been put in place to keep our staff safe, similar measures have also been taken to protect the public which interacts with Customs. Notably:

4.1. Customs officers are required to wear face mask when physically interacting with the public. Conversely, members of the public are required to wear face mask when interaction with Customs is required or when in a customs facility.

4.2. A public notice was sent out requesting the public to reduce physical interactions with Customs by utilizing electronic means of communication relating to application for administrative reviews approvals such as exemptions, appeals, etc.

4.3. Liberia Customs did recognize that during such health crisis, the public is often desperate for medical solution which might influence the influx of fake drugs and medical supplies. Customs, in collaboration with the health regulatory authorities, has undertaken special operations to prevent the importation or smuggling of counterfeit medicines and uncertified Coronavirus test kits and treatment drugs. A number of seizures have already been made at border cross-points.

Further information: Liberia Revenue Authority - FAQ Customs Goods Clearance