

**Speech by Mr Joseph W P Wong, GBS, JP  
Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology  
APEC Symposium on Trade Facilitation 2007  
Welcoming Remarks**

**4 June 2007**

Dr Fung, Mr Matsui, Prof Prescott, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the APEC Trade Facilitation Symposium 2007.  
For our APEC friends from overseas, welcome to Hong Kong.

2. As a free and open economy with little natural resources, Hong Kong relies heavily on trade. It takes two to tango, and the same applies to trade. It is only with the collective efforts of all trading partners that trade flows could be smooth and efficient. It is therefore in our vital interest to promote and enhance trade facilitation.

3. Trade facilitation means reducing costs to business operating in and between markets. And it requires all parties concerned - including the business sectors, regulators and government officials - working toward these shared goals.

4. Trade among APEC economies is significant and growing. Intra-APEC merchandise trade has more than doubled since 1994, from US\$1.4 trillion to over US\$3 trillion. For Hong Kong, 80% of our trade is with APEC members. It is entirely natural and fitting,

therefore, that trade facilitation is one of the fundamental pillars of APEC's work. Thanks to the collective efforts of all member economies over the years, APEC has come up with a wide range of practical ways and means to facilitate trade.

5. You may wonder what exactly trade facilitation means in terms of concrete actions. When one considers the various elements which make up a trading transaction, one would see that the transparency and consistency of customs procedures, harmonization of industrial standards and conformance arrangements, ease of movement of business people, and appropriate application of technology in enhancing e-commerce are all important areas which we could work on to facilitate trade flows.

6. The best known example may perhaps be the APEC Business Travel Card Scheme whereby cardholders can obtain entry visas to participating economies through one single application process, and go through fast-track immigration lanes upon arrival. 17 APEC members have joined this Scheme, and full participation by all APEC members should be within reach to further enhance business travel within the region. Shorter customs clearance times, reduced paperwork and alignment of standards are other examples of APEC's achievements in trade facilitation over the years.

7. APEC currently has 21 member economies of varying degree of development. In facilitating trade within the APEC community, we have to improve our current systems, as well as to build up capacities to narrow the differences where necessary. It is through the advancement of the APEC community as a whole that we all could benefit from more efficient trade flows.

8. APEC's Trade Facilitation Action Plan was first endorsed by APEC Leaders in 2002 as a commitment to cut transaction costs in the region. It has proved to be an effective vehicle in achieving this target, and there are many favourable elements that should be retained in the next phase of the Trade Facilitation Action Plan, such as collaboration with the private sector and experts, and identification of the capacity building needs of developing economies. Indeed, one of the major deliverables of APEC this year is to formulate the framework for the second Trade Facilitation Action Plan for endorsement by Ministers and Leaders later in the year. As a contribution to this process, Hong Kong, China is honoured to host this APEC Symposium on Trade Facilitation.

9. The purpose of our organizing this Symposium is to provide a forum for dialogue between the public and private sectors, with a view to better matching trade facilitation measures with the needs of businesses. The occasion would also serve as a forum for the exchange of views and expertise among relevant APEC contacts.

10. We are delighted to have secured three prominent keynote speakers :

(i) Dr. Victor Fung, Group Chairman of Li & Fung Group, is familiar to many of you;

(ii) Mr. Tadamitsu Matsui, President of Ryohin Keikaku which is the parent company of Muji, a successful lifestyle products retail brand within and outside Asia; and

(iii) Professor Edward Prescott, the 2004 Nobel Laureate in Economics.

We will also have Professor Edward Chen, Chairman of the Hong Kong Committee of Pacific Economic Cooperation to give us a luncheon talk later today.

11. I am also pleased to welcome a wide representation of speakers from within the APEC community.

12. As I said at the beginning, we need the collective efforts of all parties concerned towards the shared goal of facilitating trade. The good mix of audience today, including local businessmen, SME representatives, academia, think-tanks, as well as their overseas

counterparts, should provide constructive input to the Symposium. I look forward to a lively and interesting discussion, both today and tomorrow.

13. Thank you.