Press Release

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Attn: News Editor/ Chief Reporter/ Assignment Editor /Business Page-in-Charge:

**Long-Term Health Safety Measures for Export Competitiveness**

To ensure business continuity following the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, BUILD and IFC organized a virtual workshop on Health Safety Guidelines for Business Continuity and Trade Facilitation during COVID-19 for Dhaka Custom House on February 28, 2021. This initiative is supported by Bangladesh Investment Climate Fund II, which is implemented by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank Group and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The objectives of the workshop were to sensitize concerned service providers  and service takers to maintain health safety measures to run businesses even in the post-COVID stage to mitigate export losses.

Muhammed Mahbubur Rahman, Additional Commissioner, Custom House, Dhaka highlighted steps taken by the Dhaka Customs for smooth and effective implementation of their daily tasks while maintaining health safety protocol.

The Custom House clears 3,000-4,000 bill of ladings (B/L) everyday while minimizing risks and ensuring quality so that COVID exemptions are not abused. He stated that in order to maintain export and import growth as well as manage the supply chain, they worked hard so that revenue collection does not fall. Because of their sincerity, import growth has remained steady.

In the beginning Ferdaus Ara Begum, CEO, BUILD welcomed the participants and mentioned that the likely losses of export earnings annually for the country could be about USD 7 billion after the LDC graduation by 2026. We need to be prepared for that and start working in a coordinated manner to stave off the potential negative impact.

She also referred that the revenue collection in different heads such as supplementary duty, export and VAT at domestic stage has been reduced in the month of December 2020 compared to those in the corresponding month of 2019. The worst sufferers are the small entrepreneurs while there was a decline in turnover tax of 31% in the corresponding period as mentioned above. She added that we need to apply the double speed strategy to overcome the challenges at the COVID recovery stage.

Nusrat Nahid, Private Sector Specialist, International Finance Corporation, made a presentation highlighting issues of health safety and informed about the impacts of the COVID-19 in trade. She stressed upon the need to maintain different health and safety guidelines even after the roll-out of the vaccines.

She also requested the relevant stakeholders to maintain these health guidelines whenever they visit the respective Custom Houses. She also showcased some audiovisuals on health safety guidelines which was prepared after carefully reviewing all the different health protocols and guidelines issued by the Government of Bangladesh, NBR and WHO. She requested for further circulation of the AVs through different customs houses for educating the customs personnel, service providers and other relevant front liners which will save them from this deadly pandemic.

Dr. Mohammad Abul Hasnat, International Public Health Specialist, emphasized on the policy level decision for addressing this type of pandemic and appreciated the role of the government for all time-bound policies to address the pandemic. He informed the meeting that the impact of a virus may remain for 2-3 years to be contained fully, and thus we need to maintain all safety practices throughout 2021. In the “new normal”, everyone needs to adapt and carry out their activities while maintaining the safety protocols even after the introduction of the vaccine. Referring to a research study, he said that there is a tendency of vaccine hesitancy in the country. He also emphasized on the Occupational and Health Safety as a regular practice.

Ivan Peterson, Consultant of IFC also spoke on the occasion and highlighted the role of AEO which in future would contribute further to custom clearance in the country.

 Kabir Ahmed, President, BAFFA informed that, during the COVID they tried to continue service even though their logistic support is inadequate. They are waiting for the new cargo shade terminal for separate corridor for the courier service.

Bashir Ullah Bhuiyan, an importer, explained how they benefited from the online submission of documents and acceptance by the DHC for releasing his consignment within the shortest possible time. The representative from BTA informed the meeting that their industry is situated in a red zone industry. They have been educated by participation in this kind of awareness program.

Sultanul islam Tarek, Nixon Box Ind. Ltd  recommended for an emergency response team for continuity of the services to be provided during the emergency period as like as COVID.

High officials from Custom House, Dhaka and private sector officials of the trade-related agencies participated in the workshop.

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| Signature of CEO 07**Ferdaus Ara Begum**∣ CEO ∣ BUILD ∣ Mob: 01714102994, 01755592504∣ Email: ceo@buildbd.org∣ [www.buildbd.org](http://www.buildbd.org) |