

## **Government allays fears over efficiency of UNI-PASS; says new system has proven track record**

There are records at the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Industry which clearly indicates that the Government of Ghana took a decision to deploy the UNI-PASS single window service to address the issues arising from the transition from the existing Customs Management System to a new end-to-end trade facilitation regime.

Cabinet in January, 2019, set up a Joint Inter-Ministerial Oversight Committee (JIMOC) under the chairmanship of the Senior Minister, Hon. Yaw Osafo-Maafo, to oversee the smooth implementation of the new custom management system.

The JIMOC has held several meetings with the various vendors on the essence and considerable impact of the new custom management system hence an amicable transition to the new system.

Government has therefore, debunked reports that the company operating the new customs clearing system known as UNI-PASS, has no track record and the required competence to execute the work at hand.

According to the government, the impression that the UNI-PASS technology has not been deployed or tested anywhere in the world "is not accurate."

"The UNI-PASS technology has been deployed successfully in Tanzania since 2015 under the name Tancis, which World Customs Organization (WCO) has acclaimed as one of the best innovative trade facilitation systems. Cameroun, like Ghana, has deployed the same technology after successfully developing their system early this year," a statement released by the government argued.

It further pointed out that "in Equador in South America, the system has successfully been deployed since 2010 and it is still operating. The best place to see the efficacy of this UNI-PASS customs management technology is in South Korea itself where since 1998, the system has been deployed to successfully manage their complex and far bigger customs operations."

### **Fears allayed**

Allaying the fears of objectors, government further revealed that as part of efforts to ensure a successful implementation of the system, it embarked on a one-year comprehensive programme where staff of the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and officials of other relevant stakeholders were trained on the system.

“Simulation exercises, scalability and stress tests of the new system have been conducted and have all proved favourable and the reports are available for review at the Ministry of Trade and Industry,” the statement added.

### **Successful implementation**

The statement further disclosed that available records (from March 1, 2020 when the project took-off) indicate that the implementation has been largely successful.

“Government of Ghana has recorded that since March 1, 2020, imports entering the country through a limited number of entry points are being cleared through the new system. For the period, 57 freight forwarders who do business at the selected entry points have all been successfully enrolled and are clearing goods through the new UNI-PASS system,” it revealed.

Some benefits to be derived from the new UNI-PASS system, it noted, include a full ownership of the system by the government, which will not require any foreign shareholder as compared to the GCNet.

“There will be cost savings because of the single window system with an end-to-end trade facilitation system; it will improve the security of cross-border movement of persons and wholesome goods; facilitate trade across our borders; provide customs revenue assurances; and achieve better and more accurate audit trail for all goods crossing our borders for both economic and security management,” the statement assured.

### **Rationale**

Outlining a trajectory of events that led to the UNI-PASS deal, the statement explained that the decision to discontinue with the services of GCNet and other service providers was informed by the need to replace the multiplicity of vendors with a single service provider deploying an end-to-end system.

GCNet entered into an “Original Agreement” dated October 4, 2000, with SGS Societe Generale de Surveillance SA, which agreement was extended for a year and subsequently extended by two “Supplemental Agreements” ending in December 2023.

The Second Supplemental Agreement, the government noted, ought to have been approved by Parliament as International Agreements since SGS Societe Generale de Surveillance SA is a foreign company, but that was not done.

“Since this process was not done, the said agreements become void in accordance with precedent as declared by the Supreme Court,” it said.

The statement further noted that government took appropriate steps to discuss with existing vendors on their smooth and amicable exit to ensure a congenial transition to the new end-to-end system.

“GCNet was reminded that on December 4, 2018, government through the Minister for Finance convened a meeting with GCNet and West Blue at the Ministry of Finance at which government clearly indicated its decision to replace the existing service providers at the port with a single vendor who will deploy an end-to-end customs management system,” it revealed.

## **UNI-PASS**

UNI-PASS is a new port clearing system that processes documents and payments through one window. The new system is a departure from the previous system where ‘valuation and classification’ and ‘risk management and payment’ were handled by different entities.

The single window project is aimed at coordinating all activities at the ports on one platform to reduce time and cost in clearing and exporting goods.

The system, being spearheaded by Ghana Link Services Ltd, in collaboration with Customs UNI-PASS International Agency (CUPIA) of the Korean Customs Service, the designer of the system, replaces the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAARS) and the Ghana Customs Management System (GCMS) jointly operated by the Customs Division, the Ghana Community Network Services (GCNet) Ltd and West Blue Consulting.

Government wish to lay the above facts right that the Joint Inter-Ministerial Oversight Committee was only set up to oversee the smooth implementation of the new UNI-PASS custom management system to ensure security and revenue at the ports.