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**IBFD was one of the partners of the 2nd Asian Tax Authorities Symposium (ATAS), that was successfully hosted on 4-5 September 2012 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**

This year's theme was "Anti-Avoidance Rules in Taxation: Striking a Balance". ATAS was organized in partnership by the International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation (IBFD), the Inland Revenue Board, Malaysia (IRBM), the Financing for Development Office (FfDO) of the United Nations, sponsored by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the International Tax Compact (ITC), and supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

### **The main focus of ATAS**

Contributing to the building and developing of capacity in public governance for tax administration and policy, by creating and enhancing awareness in Asia-Pacific tax administrations and tax policy-makers of domestic and international tax issues caused by the increasing globalization of economic activities. It seeks to do so by providing a platform for Asia-Pacific tax authorities of developed and developing countries to explore and address the problems faced and to promote the finding of solutions through the invaluable sharing of country experiences. In particular, ATAS wishes to encourage greater country participation from developing countries in establishing acceptable international tax norms and aims to provide an avenue for these countries to highlight the issues that concern them most.

### **ATAS attendances**

ATAS was attended by high-level tax officials and experts from 21 Asia-Pacific jurisdictions, i.e. Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Many of the participants spoke and presented on pertinent tax matters and issues relating to anti-avoidance. Presentations were also given by experts from IBFD, the OECD and the United Nations FfDO.

The Symposium was opened by Mr Aurobindo Ponniah (Director, IBFD Asia-Pacific) and was followed by welcome addresses from Mr Sam van der Feltz (Chairman of the Executive Board, IBFD) and Mr Mohd Nizom Sairi (Director of Tax Investigation, IRBM), Mr Michael Lennard (Chief, International Tax Cooperation at FfDO), Dr Barbara Dutzler (Senior Adviser, ITC), and Ms Marie Jareid (Royal Norwegian Embassy, Malaysia). Prof. Jan de Goede, as Chair of ATAS 2012, introduced the topic and the set-up of the Symposium .

Mr Michael Lennard, noted the timeliness of this important Symposium on a key issue for developing countries - balancing the need for a strong revenue base to sustain development, ensure the provision of public goods and guard against global or regional shocks to the system with the need for an investment climate that encourages beneficial investment. He noted also that care had to be taken that, solutions to problems encountered when trying to achieve the appropriate balance should not be overly complex, as this often created further compliance or collection burdens, which could themselves upset the balance.



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Mr Harald Tollan of the Norwegian MFA added that “Norway sees national tax policies as a fundamental element in any country’s strategy for economic development and as a way of securing a fair share of that development for all its citizens. The international tax framework with its rules and practices has a bearing on the national policy options. We believe cooperation, peer learning, transparency and sharing of information – across borders – will benefit revenue authorities, citizens, and business alike. ATAS plays its part in that endeavour.”

Dr Barbara Dutzler, commenting on ITC’s role as a new partner in ATAS, said that ATAS was “A forum for exchange, where issues of mutual interest can be discussed, with tax authorities’ representatives from different countries that have the same technical expertise but different perspectives on policy and implementation questions – this is how we see ATAS, and this is why we think it is worthwhile to be supported” .

Prof. Jan de Goede, Symposium Chairman, summarized his experience: “I was impressed by the frank exchange of experiences and opinions between the tax authorities of such diverse countries. Tax policy, implementation, transparency and the role of the judiciary were extensively discussed. Finding a good balance regarding the various aspects of this complex topic turned indeed out to be a crucial factor. I already look forward to the next ATAS event!”

As a non-profit independent research institute, established in 1938, with a long-standing history in supporting and contributing to tax research and academic activities, IBFD took the initiative in funding and organizing this event together with its partners in order to promote the study of international taxation and address problems faced by Asian tax authorities.

For more information, contact Sorrel Hidding, Marketing Manager: +31 20 554 0142 / [s.hidding@ibfd.org](mailto:s.hidding@ibfd.org)  
For further information on ATAS, please contact IBFD’s Malaysian office: +603 2287 0709 / [ibfdasia@ibfd.org](mailto:ibfdasia@ibfd.org)

### About IBFD

IBFD is a leading provider of cross-border tax expertise, with offices in Amsterdam, Beijing, Washington and Kuala Lumpur. IBFD serves Fortune 500 companies, governments, international consultancy firms and tax advisors. Renowned as the authoritative centre for cross-border tax expertise, IBFD utilizes her global network of Tax Experts and Knowledge Centre to remain at the forefront of global tax information. [www.ibfd.org](http://www.ibfd.org)