



[Business - Lebanon](#) | 02:38 PM, Oct 31 Updated

The Daily Star

BEIRUT: In a bid to crack down on rampant corruption in the Lebanese Customs Department, the Finance Ministry Wednesday set up a complaint box and telephone lines so alleged victims can report their grievances.

However, the move was ridiculed by a source at a leading shipping company who said the action would not produce real results.

“This complaint box is a joke. Do you think anyone is going to complain about himself? Corrupt customs officials and bribers are involved in corruption [incidents]. None of them are going to step up and complain about him,” the source told The Daily Star.

According to a statement from the Finance Ministry, complaint boxes have been installed at the Customs departments, the airport and the ports.

The statement called on all citizens who fall victim to these illegal practices to come forward and report any corrupt employees or clearance staff.

In addition to the complaint boxes, citizens filing complaints can call 01-980-065 or 01-980-066 to request a meeting with the director-general of the Customs Department.

Complaints can also be emailed to gds@customs.gov.lb

The statement stressed that the authorities would take these complaints very seriously. However, the source said that the authorities should send investigation teams to closely monitor the operations at entry points such as the airport, ports and borders.

He explained that three parties are involved in the corruption at the Customs points:

customs officials, clearance offices and importers.

“Usually, the imported goods that evade Custom duties are garments and shoes. But cars, electronics and fuel shipments all pay full Customs duties,” the source said.

He said that if a shipment contained clothes or shoes, the clearance office representative negotiates the price with the Customs officials.

“Instead of paying \$20,000 for the container, the importers pays the corrupt official \$10,000 to clear the goods from the port. All of this money ends in the pockets of the corrupt employees,” the source said.

The source denied that political parties were covering up the practice.

“The corrupt officials are from different religious sects. The suppliers as well as some clearance offices are also involved in this scandal,” he said.

He added that some of the Customs employees who were caught red-handed were jailed.

“But every time the news media highlights the corruptions cases at the port and the airport, the Custom employees stop these illegal practices for a while until the heat eases. Then they go back to their old habits,” the source said.

The president of the Beirut Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Mohammad Choukeir, claimed tax evasion at the ports and airport was costing the Treasury around \$1 billion a year.

But a shipping industry official said the figure was far less than \$1 billion a year.