



First International Conference on Consumer Protection of South, South East & East Asian Countries with the theme of “Empowering consumers in new markets” concludes in New Delhi

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The First International Consumer Protection Conference on “*Empowering consumers in new markets*” for the South, South East and East Asian Countries was held on 26 to 27 October 2017 in New Delhi. His Excellency Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India inaugurated the Conference which was attended by 1600 participants that included delegates from 19 countries, Senior dignitaries from the Central Government, State Governments from India, Presidents of the Consumer Commissions, as well as private sector, consumer associations and academia. Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD addressed the conference in the Inaugural session.

The Prime Minister during his inaugural speech stated that Consumer Protection is one of the priority areas for the Government. Government’s vision is a step further from Consumer Protection to Consumer Empowerment and to Protection of Consumer Interests.

The Conference was chaired by Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution. The deliberations and exchange of experiences led to the following conclusions:

The comprehensive implementation of the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection is a priority for Governments and stakeholders in ensuring more effective and better-coordinated protection efforts in all countries and across all areas of commerce.

Wide stakeholder participation and engagement of consumer associations, businesses, and the academia is necessary for a successful consumer policy-making and enforcement.

The protection of consumers’ rights in the digital context is important for a sustainable and inclusive development of e-commerce, which also needs to address cross-border cooperation and enforcement.

Consumer protection is essential for well-functioning financial markets, and efforts should be devoted to achieve financial consumer literacy and inclusion.

Consumer education is paramount to maximize consumer empowerment, needing new and innovative ways to reach and enhance consumers’ knowledge of their rights and obligations in the marketplace.

The needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers must be attended to, in all sectors of commerce and across all areas of consumer protection including legislation, enforcement action and redress systems in accordance with their particular needs and interests.

On the suggestions of the Prime Minister it was felt that due to increasing globalisation and the world changing into a single market, it is important to learn from each other’s experiences and reach a common understanding. The possibility of building a Regional Coalition for consumer protection needs to be explored.

Creating a structured mechanism for communication, mutual sharing of best practices, creating new initiatives for capacity building and starting joint campaigns in this regard should be pursued in mutual interest.

Keeping in view the future challenges a roadmap with a clear vision for moving forward and institutionalizing regional cooperation may be explored.

Towards meeting these objectives, it was decided that Regional Consumer Protection Conferences on biannual basis will be considered, in consultations with countries in the Region regarding the structure and organisational details.

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