

WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY 2009

Be a Smart Consumer...Empower Yourself

HISTORY

The 15th of March is celebrated internationally as World Consumer Rights Day. As an annual event it seeks to highlight the rights of consumers and to lobby support for those rights to be respected and protected. Importantly also the celebration of World Consumer Rights Day provides a forum for exposing the market abuses and social injustices which undermine those rights.

The celebration of World Consumer Rights Day began with the declaration of four basic consumer rights by former US president John F Kennedy. Those rights are:

- The right to safety
- The right to be informed
- The right to choose
- The right to be heard

Through the efforts of Consumer International, the movement has added another four rights as under:

- The right to satisfaction of basic needs
- The right to redress
- The right to education
- The right to a healthy environment

As a rallying point organizations aligned to the consumer movement world-wide traditionally agree on a theme consistent with its objective. Food is again the subject of concern. Since the food crisis in 2007, which was triggered by increased global demand for staples such as wheat, corn and rice by China and

India, consumers have faced unprecedented shortages in supply and seen exponential increase in prices in the market place. This was also exacerbated by high fuel prices. Food and food production is a global agenda and therefore is the overriding issue to be confronted at this time by the Commission.

Your Rights within the context of the theme: Be a Smart Consumer: Empower Yourself

1. The right to satisfaction of basic needs

Access to such a basic and essential product such as food and food production remains a challenge for many in Jamaica who see agriculture as unprofitable and demeaning.

2. The right to safety

The liberalized market conditions exposed small and underdeveloped states to risks associated with the demands manufacturing and genetic modification of foods to meet the mass food production in less than ideal conditions where factories are environmentally hazardous. The right to safety is often not considered by the producers. e.g. China's melamine scare of August 2008 and Atlanta's Peanut Corporation of America's salmonella contamination epidemic is still not yet contained and investigations continue.

3. The right to be informed

Through the efforts of government and its agencies, consumers have benefited from specially designed articles in the areas of reading labels, understanding bar codes, identifying ingredients in packaged foods targeted at various demographics.

4. The right to choose

The options for supply sources of information remain narrow, since Jamaica is not a reading country. The newspapers and radio are the most affordable and effective means of informing persons of their choices.

5. The right to be heard

Consumer interests are represented by the Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC), and through other institutions created to allow redress and representation.

6. The right to redress

As above the CAC was created to see that consumers receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, or unsatisfactory services.

7. The right to consumer education

The work programme of the CAC has been so designed for consumers to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities and how to act on them.

8. The right to a healthy environment

While there is an active environmental movement and precautionary policy legislations cognizant of the right, there is still much work to be done. For instance we are still to correct the habit of destroying our mangroves and forests to produce charcoal, sand mining of our riverbeds, destroying plastic and the use of environmentally unfriendly fuels continue unabated.

In conclusion, the CAC will continue to advocate for increased consumer participation in the process as we seek to safeguard the future for all consumers here and across the region.

It is hoped that the celebration of World Consumer Rights Day will serve to cause consumers and merchants to engage in the wholistic approach towards creating a marketplace that is fair and just for all the stakeholders.

**Prepared for WCRD
March 2, 2009**