

LAUNCH OF 2021 WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY CELEBRATIONS

ADDRESS BY MEC: MAKALO MOHALE

VENUE: ENVIRONMENTAL HALL – NAVAL HILL

DATE: TUESDAY 09 MARCH 2021

Programme director

Acting Commissioner of the NCC – Me. Thezi Mabuza

HOD Dr. Mbulelo Nokwequ

Mangaung Metro Municipality representatives

Provincial representatives

National Consumer Commission representatives

Industry Associations

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

As our country is grappling with fluctuations in COVID-19 infections, I would like to reiterate the call and plea by President Cyril Ramaphosa to South Africans not to be complacent under level 1 lockdown as this could lead to a third wave of Covid-19 infections. We are imploring South Africans to take the pandemic seriously and change their behaviour.

The month of March is dedicated to Human Rights on the 21st March in South Africa and the Commemoration of World Consumer Rights day alike on the 15th March. Consumer rights are an integral part of human rights and vice versa. Today, we are launching and at the same time kick starting Consumer Week programme full of activities that we believe will be of great benefit to our people. We are honoured to be joined by all the consumer protection bodies from across the country whom will be participating in this consumer week. Although we are hosting this event under unusual circumstances and restrictions of Covid-19, we hope that the intended messages will reach and assist those who need our help the most.

As you would realize that the theme for this year's Commemoration of the Consumer Rights Day Celebration is "**Protecting Consumers during Covid-19**". During COVID-19 pandemic period, regulators received more complaints with regards to prize gouging of essential such as garlic and ginger. Our people are being pickpocketed daylight from their hard earned money.

The commemoration of World Consumer Rights Day is an annual occasion where we celebrate and promote the basic rights of all consumers. Often, unsuspecting people fall prey to unscrupulous businesses and lose millions of their hard earned cash on shady deals.

More importantly this is a time for promoting the basic rights of all consumers, for demanding that those rights are respected and protected, and for protesting the market abuses and social injustices which undermine them.

The Commemoration of the World Consumer Rights Day has its origins in former USA's President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's historic address to the US Congress in which he outlined his vision on Consumer Rights. This was the 1st time any politician had formerly set out such principles.

The consumer movement refined a set of eight basic consumer rights that we must familiarise ourselves with. They are:

The right to satisfaction of basic needs – to have access to basic, essential goods and services such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, public utilities, water and sanitation.

The right to safety – to be protected against products, production processes and services that are hazardous to health or life.

The right to be informed – to be given the facts needed to make an informed choice, and to be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling.

The right to choose – to be able to select from a range of products and services, offered at competitive prices with an assurance of satisfactory quality.

The right to be heard – to have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy, and in the development of products and services.

The right to redress – to receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services.

The right to consumer education – 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.

The right to a healthy environment – to live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the well-being of present and future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen, Consumer rights are constitutional rights and the Consumer Protection Office in the Department is working hard to ensure that these rights are not violated in the Free State Province. As much as the businesses are not supposed to rob you off your money, it is the responsibility of everyone here today to know your basic consumer rights that you have in order for you to protect yourself the first time you experience this.

The Consumer Protection Office is mandated by the Government of the Free State province through the Free State Province (Unfair Business Practices) Act No. 14, 1998 and Consumer Protection Act 68 of 2008 to protect consumers.

Consumer Education is of paramount importance as it improves consumer awareness and information and encourages responsible and informed consumer choice and behaviour. Again it promotes consumer confidence, empowerment and development of a culture of consumer responsibility, through individual and group education, vigilance, advocacy and activism.

The most common violations that are most prevalent at the moment which our consumers are experiencing in our Province are complaints ranging from: -

- a) Motor vehicles,
- b) Cash loans (Mashonisas),
- c) Cellular phones
- d) House letting
- e) Household appliances and *etc.*

With motor vehicles, dealers fail to provide after-sales service and documents to consumers which results in consumers failing to produce proof of purchase or

payment, ownership of products and agreement contract. With regard to electrical appliances, dealers sell defective goods to consumers and refuse to take them back. With cell phones, the problem is hidden costs charged by the dealer, therefore resulting in consumers having to pay excessive charges which they did not agree on. Cash loans and house lettings charges consumers' excessive interests.

The year 2020 presented additional challenges as a result of the national lockdown. Many businesses would unduly hike their prices, sell expired and illicit goods. Programme director, I must indicate that Foreign-run shops are the main problem currently in our province. The community and small businesses complain about the undocumented foreigners who run businesses and selling illicit goods to the community. In light of this, the court members' first assignment in 2020 was to give and input into a Bill that DESTEA intends developing to deal with foreign-run shops. The Bill will then be sent to the State Law Advisory Services for congruence and conformity. It will then be published for solicitation of comments from the members of public.

We are intent during this year's Commemoration of the World Consumer Rights Day Celebration to hammer on the following 6 (six) subjects that are extremely serious and disturbing to our consumers, and those are: -

- a) Refunds and redress
- b) Rights and responsibilities
- c) Unfair price increase / gouging
- d) Consumer Protection during Covid-19
- e) Pyramid Schemes
- f) Online shopping

In addition to this Celebration, this year marks the 18th anniversary of the 1st sitting of the Consumer Affairs Court in our Province that occurred on Friday the 11th of July – 2003. I must really commend the seriousness within which our Consumer Affairs Court takes protecting vulnerable consumers to the extent that they sit every Friday of the month. This in itself must and should be applauded.

Programme director, the past 18 (eighteen) years were characterized by achievements and challenges in anticipation to provide excellent service to our

consumers, but at the end, our consumers conquered. The Consumer Affairs Court officials who served in the previous terms since 2003 are hereby applauded with aplomb for their sterling work that has been done so far.

An invitation was extended to all citizens resident to our beautiful Province to submit their names as nominees interested in serving the Consumer Affairs Court. Today I have the privilege to announce to you that I have confirmed the following officials as the Free State's Consumer Affairs Court members on the 29th September 2020 and will serve the office until end of March 2024.

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No.	MEMBERS	No.	ALTERNATE MEMBERS
1.	Adv. N. M. Bahlekazi (Chairperson)	1.	Adv. P. du Plessis Greyling Alternate Chairperson
2.	Professor Dr. R. M. Jansen	2.	Adv. T. Segoe-Backward
3.	Mr. A. G. Sefo	3.	Mr. D. Huggett
4.	Me. D. N. Moeti	4.	Mr. F. Botha
5.	Mr. C. Bredenkamp	5.	Mr. L. M. S. Sesele

I would like to remind and encourage our people that services of the Consumer Protection Office are free of charge and Free Staters are urged to take advantage of this service that government offers to its people.

I THANK YOU