

Consumer protection bodies reminded of mandate

Trade, Industry and Competition Deputy Minister Nomalungelo Gina has reminded regulators with consumer protection mandate to continue with their efforts to put a spotlight on consumer rights.



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“We all know that South African consumers are still grappling with the effects of Covid-19, I urge the National Consumer Commission (NCC) and other regulators in the consumer protection space to leave no stone unturned when dealing with unscrupulous suppliers that are exploiting consumers,” Gina said.

Gina said that government is also aware that some scammers are always trying to outsmart regulators, and their commitment to consumer protection must keep up with the pace of these predators.

“Consumer protection depends entirely on these bodies, it is therefore imperative to remember your role and mandate,” said Gina.

Gina made the call during World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) observed on Monday, under the theme ‘Protecting Consumers during Covid-19’.

The National Consumer Commission (NCC) in partnership with the Free State Department of Economic Small Business Development and Environmental Affairs, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS), National Credit Regulator (NCR), and other various regulatory bodies under the umbrella of Consumer Protection Forum; hosted a webinar to commemorate the day.



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The Department's Deputy Director-General of Consumer Protection and Corporate Regulation, Dr Evelyn Masotja, noted that the purpose of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA No 68 of 2008) is to promote and advance social and economic welfare of consumers in South Africa.

Acting National Consumer Commissioner Thezi Mabuza said this year's theme is aligned to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa.

As champions of consumer protection, Mabuza said they have to look at pertinent issues affecting consumers during this time, and find ways to address them.

"A multidisciplinary team of national and provincial government departments as well as regulators with mandates relevant to consumer protection in business compliance, started with inspections in different parts of the Free State last week, to nudge the market to comply with the provisions of the Act. Our team of investigators issued compliance notices to businesses flaunting the CPA and other laws of the country," Mabuza said.

Mabuza also reassured South Africans that as consumer protection bodies in the space, they will not rest until South Africans know their consumer rights.

"Consumer protection is in our hands. We would only declare victory when the bulk of our consumers are able to fight for their rights when faced with unscrupulous suppliers," Mabuza said.

Consumer Law Module

In launching a Consumer Law Module to be offered to fourth year students, Ntando Ncamane from the University of Fort Hare said the module will focus on various Acts, including the CPA, National Credit Act (NCA), and the Community Schemes Ombuds Services Acts (CSOSA).

"This module will be useful to those who intend to gain knowledge in the consumer law space and will equip learners who intend to pursue careers in the consumer law. Over time, the university will gradually introduce short courses to consumer protection practitioners," Ncamane highlighted.

About consumer rights

World Consumer Rights Day is celebrated annually to highlight fundamental consumer rights.

The Bill of Rights enshrines the rights of all South Africans – including consumer rights. The Consumer Protection Act further outlines these key consumer rights, of which all South African consumers should be aware.

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These include right to equality in the Consumer Market and Protection Against Discriminatory Marketing Practices; right to privacy; right to choose; right to disclosure of information; right to fair and responsible marketing; right to fair and honest dealing; and right to fair, just and reasonable terms and conditions.

Consumers also have the right to fair value, good quality and safety; as well as right to accountability by suppliers.

On this day (WCRD), consumer protection regulators raise awareness about consumer rights while suppliers are also reminded to adhere to the prescripts of the law.

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