

Consumer rights

Consumers are unaware of and often indifferent about their rights. For the first time US President John F. Kennedy a politician had specified his vision of consumer rights. On 15 March, 1962, he delivered an historic address to the US Congress in which he had formerly set out such principles.



'Consumers by definition include us all,' Kennedy said in his Congressional Statement, 'They are the largest economic group, affecting and affected by almost every public and private economic decision. Yet they are the only important group... whose views are often not heard.'

(<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9108>)

He declared four basic consumer rights

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

After two decades in the 1980s, four more rights were added by the international coalition of consumer groups:

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

Considering the importance of Kennedy's speech to the US Congress on this day, and the resultant law, the Consumers International (CI) took a decision in 1982 to observe **15 March** as the **World Consumer Rights Day** from 1983. CI is the only independent global campaigning voice for consumers with over 250 member organisations in 120 countries.



The right of consumers is a part of the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP) (http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/consumption_en.pdf). The guidelines were adopted by the UN in 1985 with eight basic consumer rights.

The rights can be described in the following terms:

The right to satisfaction of basic needs - To have access to basic, essential goods and services: 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.

Consumer responsibilities

Anwar-Fazal In the 1980s, CI's then president, led the call to also introduce a set of consumer responsibilities to compliment consumer rights.

Critical awareness - consumers must be awakened to be more questioning about the provision of the quality of goods and services.



Involvement or action - consumers must assert themselves and act to ensure that they get a fair deal.

Social responsibility - consumers must act with social responsibility, with concern and sensitivity to the impact of their actions on other citizens, in particular, in relation to disadvantaged groups in the community and in relation to the economic and social realities prevailing.

Ecological responsibility - there must be a heightened sensitivity to the impact of consumer decisions on the physical environment, which must be developed to a harmonious way, promoting conservation as the most critical factor in improving the real quality of life for the present and the future.

Solidarity - the best and most effective action is through cooperative efforts through the formation of consumer/citizen groups who together can have the strength and influence to ensure that adequate attention is given to the consumer interest.

Source: <http://www.consumersinternational.org/who-we-are/consumer-rights/>
<http://www.cuts-international.org/Consumer-Rights.htm>