

CONSUMER ACTIVISM AFTER CANCUN

For the past few years, the international consumer protection movement is expanding. With consumers International (CI) taking a lead, consumer right movement is gaining entry into trade and economic issues. The 17th World Consumer Congress held in Lisbon in October 2003 has asked the national government to link trade policies to consumers' lives.

In a policy paper, CI says trade policy directly affects consumers' lives and consumers' rights. Thus what consumers need should be at the centre of consumer advocacy. CI says the consumer protection movement should advocate for the fulfillment of those needs not only in the language of the policy, but also in the passionate language of humanism.

Highlighting the effects of globalization, the congress has called for defining the kind of globalization that is good for consumers.

The starting point for any concept of globalization should be to put an end to poverty. Consumers need to live in economies where sustainable development to reduce poverty is realistically promoted.

The global vision of sustainable development would associate reducing poverty with adequate health.

CI says trade agreements alone cannot create decent standard of living. That larger picture would encompass advocacy by consumer groups for fundamental and structural changes in global institutions related to trade. It calls for revision of the goals, structure and programmes of WTO, IMF and the World Bank.

It says WTO should protect and advance need of billions of poor citizens in the least developed and developing economies.

The policies and messages of consumer groups must reach not only policy makers in the powerful global institutions, but the political and opinion leaders of the many less powerful countries.

The CI says that in the post-Cancun world, power relationships between developed and developing countries have taken a dramatic turn.

The previously powerless have joined together and their bargaining power has increased. Thus the consumer protection movement should address their concerns too.

It is time Indian consumer protection groups expand their concept of consumer movement and look beyond Consumer Protection Act..

