

***KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND TOURISM, Ms. MC MASILELA, MPL, ON THE OCASSION OF THE
CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY 2025
HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA, CITY OF MBOMBELA
LOCAL MUNICIPALITY***

Friday, 14 March 2025

Programme Directors, Ms. Thezi Mabuza and Ms. Immy Serakalala;
Executive Mayor of the City of Mbombela Local Municipality, Cllr.
Sibongile Makushe-Mazibuko;
Acting Commissioner of the National Consumer Commission, Mr. Hardin
Ratshisusu;
Vice Chancellor of the University of Mpumalanga, Professor Thoko
Mayekiso;
Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman, Ms. Queen Munya;
Divisional Manager in the Office of the Competition Commissioner, Mr.
Andile Gwabenj;
Moderators for our panel discussions, Ms. Phezi Mabuza, Ms. Tshepiso
Masenya and Mr. Joe Selolo;
Officials from government and the University of Mpumalanga;
Distinguished guests;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen;

San'bonani!

1. Mahatma Gandhi once said, and I quote: ***“A consumer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not a burden to us. He is the boss”***, unquote.
2. Programme Directors; this quote emphasises the **consumer's role as the driving force of the economy**; it emphasises that the **survival and growth of any business is totally dependent on customers**, and not the other way around. Thus, without customers, no business would survive; and without businesses, there would be not economic growth and development.
3. This quote by Mahatma Gandhi is very appropriate to today's event, as we celebrate World Consumer Rights Day, under the theme: ***“Empowering Consumers, Balancing Rights with Ethical Business Practices”***.
4. Through this theme, we called upon to empower the boss – the customer – **by reminding them about their rights** in the business space.
5. I am, therefore, honoured and privileged to have been afforded this opportunity, to address this auspicious occasion, as we join world nations in celebrating **World Consumer Rights Day**.
6. I am also excited to be amongst a dynamic group of businesses, professionals, innovators, and advocates who all share a common commitment to protecting and empowering consumers.

7. And as a Province, we are **thankful to the National Consumer Commission**, under the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, for having chosen our Province to host this year's national celebration of the **World Consumer Rights Day**.
8. Programme Directors; World Consumer Rights Day was first observed on 15 March 1983, with the aim **to raise global awareness about consumer rights and the importance of fair practices in the marketplace**.
9. The day was inspired by former US President John F Kennedy, who on 15 March 1962, sent a special message to the US congress **to highlight the significance of protecting consumer rights**.
10. In his speech, President Kennedy outlined consumer rights, which included **the right to safety, the rights to be informed, the right to choose, and the right to be heard**.
11. This was after the realisation that **some business owners actually take consumers for granted**; they forget that the survival of their businesses solely depend on the same consumer they take for granted.
12. This is not far-fetched from what we continue to experience in our country, even in this Province, wherein **expired goods are sold to consumers**.

13. During this week, the National Consumer Commission led a multi-sectoral business inspection operation in our Province, and quite a number of expired goods were confiscated.
14. We really need to recognise that **consumers are no longer passive recipients; they are active participants who have a choice.**
15. **Service providers must deliver quality and value** in the products or services they offer, or even in customer interactions. But this goes beyond that, as providers of goods and services **must also ensure privacy, respect data and create an environment where every consumer feels valued and heard.**
16. And as we celebrate this significant day, we are thus **reminded of the central role that consumers play in our economy**, and the critical need to protect their rights, while also **encouraging businesses to operate ethically, responsibly, and with integrity.**
17. As consumers are the bedrock of world economies, they must be empowered through information by being **made aware of their rights and be protected from unscrupulous business practices.**
18. **However, empowering consumers** means more than just ensuring they are aware of their rights; it also means creating an environment where they **feel confident, safe, and informed** when making decisions in the marketplace.

19. In this context, we need to ensure that consumers are **equipped with the knowledge to protect themselves from harmful practices**, such as misleading advertising, unfair contract terms, and deceptive business strategies.
20. But, of course, empowerment is a two-way street. Just as we seek to empower consumers, we must also **emphasise the role of businesses in maintaining ethical standards**.
21. It is not enough to simply adhere to the bare minimum of legal requirements; businesses must go above and beyond to establish a culture of fairness, respect, and responsibility.
22. **Ethical business practices** are the cornerstone of consumer confidence. Without integrity, businesses risk of eroding trust, which is the foundation of any successful market.
23. Programme Directors; in an age where information is at our fingertips and businesses are often just a click away, consumers have more power than ever before.
24. Yet, with this power comes great responsibility – responsibility not only for consumers to make informed choices but also for **businesses to operate in a manner that is transparent, honest, and ethical**.

25. We are, however, fortunate to be part of a global movement where governments, regulatory bodies, and industry leaders are increasingly **focused on this delicate balance between consumer rights and business ethics.**
26. Here in Mpumalanga, we are **committed to supporting this global mission by fostering an environment where both consumers and businesses can thrive,** operating hand-in-hand.
27. Through our **Consumer Affairs Court** which we relaunched last night, and the ongoing work of consumer protection agencies, we are not only addressing consumer complaints but also **reinforcing the need for ethical business practices.**
28. Accordingly, government, alongside business leaders and civil society, must continue to work together **to establish clear and fair standards,** while also educating consumers on how they can protect themselves from exploitative practices.
29. We are committed to ensuring that every consumer, regardless of their background or economic status, has **access to the tools and resources they need to make informed choices.**
30. Programme Directors; ladies and gentlemen; consumers and businesses alike must be partners in this journey, with both sides respecting the rights and responsibilities that come with participating in the economy.

31. As government, we will **continue to advocate for policies and practices that strengthen consumer rights**, while encouraging businesses to operate ethically and responsibly.
32. Together, we can build a future where consumers are not only empowered, but also protected in every aspect of their interactions in the marketplace.
33. Programme Directors; before I retreat, I would like to remind you that our Province has been assigned by the Presidency to **host the G20 Tourism Ministers' meeting in September** this year.
34. This is really a great opportunity **to showcase our tourism products offerings**, and we believe our economy will surely benefit from hosting such international meeting and related engagements.
35. Our people are ready to welcome the world, as we host this all-significant gathering.
36. I still assert that **tourism is the goose that lays the golden egg** for us; **it is our gold mine**, and we must exploit it fully to realise significant economic growth and massive job creation.
37. To all stakeholders, thank you very much for your commitment to the course of protecting consumer rights, and for the work you continue to do to ensure that the marketplace remains a space of trust, fairness, and respect for all.

38. Without your unwavering commitment, consumer exploitation would continue unchallenged. Through the constant inspection operations, you continue to conduct throughout the year, **consumers' confidence in our work remains very high.**
39. May you continue to do your work with zoom and zeal, as you are the only beacon of hope for consumers.
40. We are '***A Province that Works For All***'; hence we will ***Leave No One Behind, as We Grow Mpumalanga*** together!
41. **Happy World Consumer Rights Day** tomorrow!

Ngiyabonga!