



COMESA Competition Commission

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Common Market for Eastern
and Southern Africa

PRESS RELEASE

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COMMEMORATION OF WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY UNDER THE THEME “FAIR AND RESPONSIBLE AI FOR CONSUMERS.”

The COMESA Competition Commission (the “Commission”) is a regional body corporate established pursuant to Article 6 of the COMESA Competition Regulations (“the Regulations”). The Commission has a mandate to promote and encourage competition by preventing restrictive business practices and other restrictions that deter the efficient operation of markets, thereby enhancing the welfare of the consumers in the Common Market, and to protect consumers against offensive conduct by market actors.

The Commission’s mandate spans across 21 Member States of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa¹, and applies to conduct that affects two or more Member States.

Every year on 15 March, the world commemorates the World Consumer Rights Day, which is a day set aside in recognition of the rights of consumers and promotion of consumer protection. This special day provides a platform for countries, organizations, consumers and other relevant stakeholders to focus discussions on topical consumer protection issues. The theme for the celebrations of the World Consumer Rights Day 2024 is “*Fair and responsible AI for Consumers*”, and the Commission is joining the rest of the World to commemorate the day.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking the world by storm and as consumers, we need to recognize the importance of keeping abreast with such developments in technology which have an impact on our lives. AIs are used across various sectors including healthcare, education, manufacturing, finance, transportation, and entertainment to autonomously

¹ Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

perform tasks in a manner that simulates human intelligence, through the use of intelligent machines using algorithms.

We recognize that AIs present a number of advantages to consumers including customized recommendations on products and services; access to improved and timely customer care services; reduced time and cost for product or information searching; enabling consumers to make informed decisions based on already analyzed data; timely diagnostics and personalized treatment plans; and detection and prevention of both physical and cyber security threats, among others.

It is however notable that there exist a number of consumer concerns associated with this technology, which as consumer protection regulators, we cannot ignore. AIs may compromise on the privacy of consumers, perpetuate misinformation and manipulation of consumers, reduce transparency in transactions, reinforce social biases and discriminative tendencies, increases cyber insecurities and lead to loss of jobs.

It is therefore important that consumers are aware of the possible effects and ensure that they are alert and responsible when purchasing goods and services involving AIs. Businesses operating in the Common Market, and intending to rely on AIs, should comply with the COMESA Competition Regulations and the national laws on consumer protection, by ensuring that their products perform the purpose for which they were designed, that they are not hazardous or unsafe to consumers and are free of misleading and unconscionable aspects. The business operators must have a good understanding of the AIs, and seek to educate their customers through providing guidelines to consumers on the functionality of the system, associated risks, and precautions, if any. Where businesses engage in comparisons of AI products against other products, this must be valid, reasonable, accurate and fair.

Joint Commemoration of the WCRD

This year, the Commission will be taking part in several activities to raise awareness on consumer rights and the concerns on AIs in the Common Market, and as is custom, will be collaborating with several Member States in marking the day.

I take this opportunity to wish all consumers an informative World Consumer Rights Day 2024!



Dr Willard Mwemba
Director and Chief Executive Officer
COMESA Competition Commission