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Report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy on its seventh session

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 3 and 4 July 2023

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I. Agreed conclusions

The Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy,

Recalling the resolution adopted by the Eighth United Nations Conference to Review All Aspects of the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices (Geneva, 2020),¹

Recalling General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015 titled “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”,

Recalling further General Assembly resolution 70/186 of 22 December 2015 titled “Consumer protection”, adopting the revised United Nations guidelines for consumer protection,

Taking note of the decision of the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Bridgetown, 2021) in paragraphs 56, 62 and 127 (z) that “in the process of transformation, it is fundamental for fair, sound and robust competition and consumer protection policies and enforcement to maintain a robust, level playing field and enhance transparency for all participants, so that market access is not under anticompetitive practices. Ensuring effective competition, including through support in developing and implementing competition policies and through cooperation among competition authorities, paired with robust consumer protection in the market, will help foster economic efficiency, resulting in safer and better products at lower prices for consumers”, that “multilateral dialogue and cooperation are crucial in areas such as the governance of new and emerging technologies, including those related to data management, competition and consumer protection” and that UNCTAD should “continue to assist developing countries to formulate and implement competition and consumer protection policies and laws, facilitate cooperation among competition and consumer protection agencies, conduct peer reviews and foster the exchange of knowledge and best practices, including through multilateral forums, such as the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy and the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, and by contributing to the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conferences to Review All Aspects of the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices and of the revised United Nations guidelines for consumer protection”,²

Welcoming the measures and interventions taken by Governments in the field of consumer protection against the cost-of-living crisis through coordinated international and regional actions to mitigate the negative impact on domestic markets and consumer welfare,

Recognizing the important contribution of UNCTAD, serving as the focal point on consumer protection within the United Nations system, in improving consumer protection at the global level and advancing policy discussions, in particular on consumer product safety, sustainable consumption, electronic commerce (e-commerce) and online dispute resolution,

Recognizing the need to strengthen the work of UNCTAD in consumer protection law and policy so as to enhance its development role and benefits for consumers and businesses,

Reaffirming the fundamental role that consumer protection law and policy plays in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by ensuring access by consumers to essential goods and services, empowering consumers and protecting them from fraudulent and deceptive commercial practices and boosting consumer education to ensure more informed choices,

Recognizing the crucial role that consumers play in the transition to clean energy by influencing market dynamics and in the adoption of sustainable practices in accordance with their legitimate needs and interests, namely those of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers; and calling upon businesses to provide sustainable choices and accurate and reliable information,

¹ TD/RBP/CONF.9/9.

² TD/541/Add.2.

Recognizing that protecting consumers on online platforms is critical to building trust in digital markets and that effective protection of online consumers requires coordination between consumer protection authorities and other government authorities, such as those in charge of competition, data protection, e-commerce and financial services,

Noting the important written and oral contributions from consumer protection authorities and other participants that enriched the debate during its seventh session,

Taking note of the deliberations of the working groups on consumer product safety, on consumer protection in e-commerce and on consumer protection and gender, and of the reports presented at its seventh session,

Taking note with appreciation of the documentation prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat for its seventh session,

1. *Welcomes* the efforts of member States and other stakeholders in implementing the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection and reaffirms its commitment to providing an annual forum and modalities for multilateral consultations, discussions and exchanges of views between member States on matters related to the guidelines;
2. *Underlines* the direct and positive impact that the adoption of consumer protection policies by member States has on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in reducing inequalities within and among countries and in strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development;
3. *Congratulates* the Government of Gabon for its voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy, looking forward to the successful implementation of the policy recommendations and encouraging interested member States to volunteer for future peer reviews of consumer protection law and policy as implemented by consumer protection authorities, including as peer reviewers;
4. *Encourages* member States to improve consumers' access to clean energy; to provide accessible, accurate and reliable information; and to empower consumers to make sustainable and informed decisions;
5. *Encourages* member States to enhance consumer protection on online platforms through market monitoring, regulation, enforcement, consumer education and business guidance and the engagement of online platforms, prioritizing the areas of consumer information and education, advertising, product safety, data protection, dispute resolution and enforcement;
6. *Recognizes* the important role of relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, particularly with regard to consumer protection policies; welcomes the participation of consumer authorities, consumer associations, civil society, business and industry representatives and academia in the deliberations of the sessions of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy; and encourages these participants to present written papers and submissions in advance of the sessions;
7. *Encourages* the continuation of the information-gathering process on the legal and institutional framework for consumer protection, including in particular the development of the UNCTAD world consumer protection map; and invites all member States to participate in its completion and update;
8. *Emphasizes* the importance of regional cooperation in the enforcement of consumer protection law and policy; invites consumer protection authorities to strengthen their national legislative frameworks for international, regional and bilateral cooperation, in the light of guidelines 79 to 94; and requests the UNCTAD secretariat to continue to explore, gather and promote best practices for international cooperation;
9. *Welcomes* the initiatives carried out by individual member States, UNCTAD and other organizations and networks in building capacity and strengthening institutions in the area of consumer protection; and calls upon all interested parties to work together and identify and strengthen synergies;

10. *Decides* to renew the mandate of the working group on consumer protection in e-commerce, to continue work on dark commercial patterns and consumer vulnerability in e-commerce, aimed at producing accessible outputs to assist less experienced consumer agencies, calling upon member States to provide a generic email address as a key contribution to the working group, and to report on its continued work to the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy;

11. *Decides* to renew the mandate of the working group on consumer product safety until the Ninth United Nations Conference to Review All Aspects of the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices, to continue work on strengthening consumer product safety frameworks at the regional and national levels and improving international cooperation to protect consumers from hazards to their health and safety, to propose a recommendation on general consumer product safety, to explore the viability and potentially the development of a model law for the implementation of the recommendation on preventing the cross-border distribution of known unsafe consumer products and to report on its continued work to the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy;

12. *Decides* to renew the mandate of the working group on consumer protection and gender, to continue work on integrating the topic at the international, regional and national levels and to report on its continued work to the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy;

13. *Requests* the UNCTAD secretariat, in accordance with guideline 97 (b), to prepare reports and studies as background documentation for the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy on the topic of enhancing the consumer movement: means to facilitate the development of independent consumer groups;

14. *Requests* the UNCTAD secretariat to facilitate consultations and the exchange of views among member States on the topic of protecting consumers as tourists;

15. *Requests* the UNCTAD secretariat to prepare, for the consideration of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, an updated review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on consumer protection law and policy, including an impact assessment;

16. *Requests* the UNCTAD secretariat to continue to compile a list of contact persons of consumer protection authorities, to facilitate cooperation in accordance with guideline 87;

17. *Notes with appreciation* the voluntary financial and other contributions received from member States; invites member States to continue to assist UNCTAD on a voluntary basis in its capacity-building and technical cooperation activities by providing experts, training facilities and financial or other resources; and requests the UNCTAD secretariat to pursue capacity-building and technical cooperation activities, including training, and, where possible, to focus such activities on maximizing their impact in all interested countries.

Closing plenary
4 July 2023

II. Chair's summary

A. Introduction

1. The seventh session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 3 and 4 July 2023, with physical and remote participation. Representatives from 70 countries and nine intergovernmental organizations, including the heads of consumer protection authorities, as well as five non-governmental organizations, attended the high-level discussions.

B. Opening plenary

2. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD stated that only 12 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals were on track to be achieved by 2030. Consumers were at the centre of cascading global crises, and consumer protection was the armour that could shield consumers from harm, deception and fraud; and could serve as the foundation for building the trust that fuelled development and multilateralism. The fast-growing digital economy exposed consumers to new challenges and vulnerabilities. Consumer protection could help address two major global challenges, namely, the digital divide and climate degradation. The Deputy Secretary-General noted that, to meet the targets in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a revolution in production and consumption was needed, particularly in order to unleash the potential of demand-side strategies. Consumers needed education and awareness to be able to play a transformative role. In this regard, the Deputy Secretary-General stated that a proactive consumer protection framework was required, along with collective efforts by Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders.

C. Report on the implementation of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection by member States and relevant stakeholders (Agenda item 3)

3. In accordance with paragraph 97 (a) of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy heard reports by member States and relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the guidelines. The panel was composed of the following: Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of National Economy, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Secretary, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, India; Chair, National Competition Agency, Georgia; Deputy Secretary-General, Office of Consumer Protection Board, Thailand; and Director of International Cooperation, Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, Poland.

4. The first panellist highlighted that the Democratic Republic of the Congo planned to adopt a consumer protection law in line with United Nations guidelines. He outlined current sectoral legislation and regulatory bodies that aimed to protect consumers in markets such as farming, electricity and telecommunications. In addition, he expressed appreciation for UNCTAD support in legal reform and capacity-building through a technical cooperation project.

5. The second panellist detailed the robust dispute resolution and product liability regimes in India. He noted increasing concerns about the fast-evolving digital economy and stated that greater government responsibility was needed in protecting consumers. India had developed a template for online dispute resolution and other countries were invited to join, to create a global platform.

6. The third panellist highlighted the consumer protection law adopted in Georgia in 2022. Despite limited power in regulated sectors, the authority had implemented most European Union directives concerning consumer protection. In addition, the authority actively made use of the United Nations guidelines in its activities. The panellist emphasized

the importance of cooperation with international and national regulators and expressed appreciation for UNCTAD support.

7. The fourth panellist detailed the online system for complaints handling and dispute resolution in Thailand. Key features included complaint referrals between 22 agencies under memorandums of understanding and an electronic mediation service. The system saved time and costs, reduced confrontations between parties and generated data, to inform consumer choices and support surveillance.

8. The fifth panellist presented the priorities of the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network under the Presidency of Poland, focused on helping consumers make informed and responsible decisions through strengthened international cooperation. She highlighted the need to coordinate work between partner networks, including UNCTAD, and commended the advocacy work of UNCTAD. In addition, she encouraged young consumer protection authorities to participate in the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network.

D. Latest developments in legal and institutional frameworks: UNCTAD world consumer protection map (Agenda item 4)

9. The UNCTAD secretariat presented the UNCTAD world consumer protection map, which displayed information from 108 member States.³ The website, open for submissions from all member States, aimed to provide an updated and comprehensive picture of the legal and institutional framework for consumer protection worldwide, identifying trends and challenges and informing discussions on future work. The website had been updated to highlight the topics of consumer product safety, dispute resolution, e-commerce, financial services and sustainable consumption.

E. Reports of the working groups on: (a) consumer product safety; (b) consumer protection in electronic commerce; (c) consumer protection and gender (Agenda item 5)

10. The UNCTAD secretariat presented the reports of the working groups. Several experts detailed developments in these areas and welcomed the work carried out by UNCTAD. At its closing plenary meeting on 4 July 2023, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy adopted agreed conclusions on this agenda item (see chapter I).

F. Building trust in digital markets through enhanced consumer protection on online platforms (Agenda item 6)

11. Under the agenda item, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy held one round-table discussion. In opening the discussion, the UNCTAD secretariat presented the background document on building trust in digital markets through enhanced consumer protection on online platforms (TD/B/C.I/CPLP/34). The panel was composed of the following: Deputy Director, Bureau of Law Enforcement and Inspection, State Administration for Market Regulation, China; Director, International and European Union Affairs, Competition Authority, Italy; Director, Department of Projects and Policies for Collective and Diffuse Rights, National Consumer Secretariat, Brazil; Director, International Cooperation, Office of the Consumer Protection Board, Thailand; Director, Consumer Protection, Competition and Markets Authority, United Kingdom of Great Britain

³ See <https://unctadwcpm.org>.

and Northern Ireland; Head of Unit, Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission; and President, Mumbai Grahak Panchayat, India.

12. The first panellist outlined recent developments in China in protecting consumers in the digital market, including the enactment and amendment of regulations, enforcement actions against platforms regarding unfair competition, improvement in online consumer complaints handling and dispute resolution mechanisms and efforts to raise consumer awareness. In effectively regulating emerging business models in the digital economy, she highlighted the importance of clearly defining the responsibilities of different actors involved in online transactions. In addition, she stressed the importance of international cooperation, and commended the role of UNCTAD as a global platform for information exchanges among member States.

13. The second panellist detailed enforcement actions by the Competition Authority of Italy in the areas of data protection on social media platforms, consumer protection issues on e-commerce platforms and vulnerable consumers, particularly young people. He identified four key factors in ensuring effective consumer protection on online platforms, namely a suitable legal framework and adequate enforcement powers; a multidisciplinary and coordinated approach; consumer empowerment; and international cooperation. He also highlighted the importance of networking and informal cooperation with peer enforcers from foreign agencies and commended the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy in this regard.

14. The third panellist outlined efforts in Brazil to update regulations on digital platforms, including a proposed bill aimed at treating the relationship between a user and an online platform as a relationship of consumption, to make online platforms subject to consumer protection laws as intermediaries. He stressed that digital platforms should be held liable for misinformation on platforms, as the use of algorithms largely affected how information circulated. The consumer protection authority had the power to monitor platforms and demand the removal of fraudulent information. To deepen international cooperation, the panellist suggested a study of comparative law related to digital issues and the creation of a subgroup or new working group on liability regimes for digital platforms.

15. The fourth panellist detailed the online dispute resolution system in Thailand, developed with the assistance of UNCTAD. To implement recommendations on online complaints handling stemming from the voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy in Thailand, the agency had encouraged businesses to join the system by establishing a premediation process, and would continue to work on raising awareness among consumers. The panellist welcomed continued support from and collaboration with UNCTAD.

16. The fifth panellist outlined the work of the Competition and Markets Authority of the United Kingdom related to digital platforms, focused on addressing misleading practices of digital platforms and the failure of platforms to prevent misleading practices by third parties. In better engaging digital platforms in improving consumer protection, the panellist highlighted the importance of enforcement action that prioritized the most harmful individual practices, to deter misconduct, and complementary measures such as compliance guidance. The panellist stressed the importance of information-sharing between countries.

17. The sixth panellist noted the issue of cross-border sales of unsafe products through online marketplaces, detailing the new European Union regulation on product safety, with provisions related to online marketplaces. The panellist outlined the non-legislative initiatives of the European Commission, such as a digital tool for surveillance' training problems in enforcement in e-commerce; and joint product testing and risk assessment, highlighting creativity in developing novel solutions. In addition, she stressed the role of the voluntary product safety pledge in engaging online platforms.

18. The seventh panellist outlined the legal framework in India related to consumer protection in e-commerce. The Government of India had established a free national consumer helpline to handle complaints and, to address the issue of delays in obtaining redress from consumer courts, the Government was developing a pre-litigation online dispute resolution platform. The panellist highlighted the success of the online dispute resolution platform established by Mumbai Grahak Panchayat. In addition, he discussed the roles of different

stakeholders and the need for all stakeholders to be involved in building a consumer protection system for digital consumers. He suggested that UNCTAD could set up a working group on online dispute resolution.

19. During the ensuing discussion, several delegates and one expert shared experiences of work on product safety, noting measures such as those on digital labelling, algorithm filtering and multi-stakeholder engagement. The representative of one regional group suggested that UNCTAD should draft a recommendation on general product safety principles. A few delegates noted measures to address fake reviews, such as voluntary standards and the use of artificial intelligence to detect fake reviews. One delegate, with regard to dispute resolution mechanisms, suggested that arbitration could be mandatory in some sectors. Another delegate stressed the difficulty in small countries of compelling action by digital transnational platforms. A few delegates discussed whether fines were an adequate mechanism with which to address consumer harm caused by digital platforms. In addition, a few delegates requested UNCTAD to provide capacity-building and facilitate technology transfer, to help developing countries better protect digital consumers.

G. Consumer protection and the transition to clean energy (Agenda item 7)

20. Under the agenda item, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy held one round-table discussion. The UNCTAD secretariat opened the discussion. The panel was composed of the following: Director General, Consumer Directorate General, Portugal; Chief Executive Officer, Competition Commission, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; Member, Chair's Advisory Group, Committee on Consumer Policy, International Organization for Standardization; and Director General, Consumers International.

21. The first panellist stated that ensuring universal access to energy was the basis of the clean energy transition. She outlined the strategy in Portugal, focused on addressing energy poverty, access to renewable energy, consumer empowerment and consumer participation in decision-making. She highlighted the role of renewable energy advocates in promoting the decentralization of clean energy production and consumer education to empower consumers. In addition, the panellist suggested that UNCTAD could convene a working group on clean energy and develop a digital tool to map measures among member States.

22. The second panellist detailed the role of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa in advocacy and cooperation at the regional level. The least developed countries faced significant challenges in financing the clean energy transition. The long-term benefits of the clean energy transition and the costs of climate change had not fully been accounted for in policymaking to date. In this regard, the panellist noted that joint efforts were needed, to support the least developed countries, along with advocacy work to sensitize Governments and consumers to the importance of clean energy.

23. The third panellist highlighted the role of standards in facilitating the clean energy transition. Standards could promote responsible business practices, consumer voice and consumer participation. She outlined relevant international standards. As consumers were often underrepresented in consultations, the panellist suggested that Governments could provide proactive support to engage consumers. In addition, the panellist noted the need for international cooperation, and welcomed involvement by consumer protection experts in the work of the Committee on Consumer Policy.

24. The fourth panellist detailed the work of Consumers International in empowering consumers as part of the clean energy transition, highlighting the importance of building trust and supporting consumer choice in the energy system. She suggested that consumer protection communities should measure consumer experience; assess companies against standards; ensure clear labelling of new technologies; empower consumers; and implement financing models for vulnerable consumers.

25. During the ensuing discussion, one delegate and one expert noted that consumers should be encouraged to become producers of clean energy. One delegate stressed the need

to support poor consumers. Another delegate suggested that UNCTAD could develop a consumer protection assessment, to assist member States in implementing clean energy transition policies in line with the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection.

H. Voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy: Gabon (Agenda item 8)

26. The voluntary peer review opened with a presentation by the UNCTAD secretariat of the main findings and recommendations in the background report on the legal, policy and institutional frameworks for consumer protection in Gabon (TD/B/C.I/CPLP/35). Representatives of the Governments of Morocco, the United States of America and Viet Nam acted as peer reviewers.

27. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Gabon presented an overview of the legislative and regulatory framework for consumer protection in Gabon, including a law drafted in 2022. In strengthening consumer protection, she highlighted the need for a national vision of consumer protection policy, as well as cooperation between executive authorities that might be autonomous or independent. She stressed that an effective consumer protection policy required not only preventative measures, such as consumer information and education, product quality control and the promotion of sustainable consumption patterns, but also effective enforcement and remedy mechanisms. She underlined the importance of the peer review process, to develop and consolidate the consumer protection system in Gabon, in alignment with the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection, through the exchange of experiences with peers and other delegations.

28. In response to a question from one peer reviewer on how to encourage consumer complaints, the Director General for Competition, Consumption and Fraud Repression, Ministry of Economy and Recovery, Gabon, detailed the role of the agency as a focal point for facilitating complaints-handling, through cooperation with other public bodies and consumer protection associations. He highlighted consumer outreach and awareness-raising activities carried out through various channels, particularly national television, radio and social media in local languages.

29. In response to a question from another peer reviewer on the role of consumer protection associations, the Director General outlined the multiple roles, including the representation of consumer interests, the formulation of recommendations on legislative and regulatory provisions, the processing of consumer complaints and the education of consumers. In response to another question on administrative sanctions, the Director General detailed the sanctions that the agency could apply, such as issuing a warning; ordering the termination of a breach; withdrawing or ordering a recall of any unsafe product; ordering an offender to inform the consumer or the public; withdrawing an authorization, permit or licence; and imposing administrative fines.

30. In response to a question from another peer reviewer on the expanded powers of the agency under the draft bill, the Director General stated that the bill would strengthen investigative powers, raise the ceiling of sanctions that the agency could impose and enable the agency and registered associations to facilitate access to courts by individual consumers. In response to another question on regulatory changes needed to improve the capacity of the agency with regard to international cooperation, the Director General cited relevant articles in the draft bill and other legislation that encouraged international cooperation, and noted that UNCTAD was an enabler of international cooperation.

31. The peer reviewers provided examples from national experiences. One peer reviewer detailed the benefits of regional cooperation, including support in policy and law formulation, information-sharing, cross-border enforcement and capacity-building. Active participation in regional cooperation frameworks helped countries fulfil obligations under international or regional agreements and strengthened ties between countries in the region. To address emerging issues in digital financial services, the peer reviewer stressed the need for research and compliance by businesses and digital platforms with both sectoral laws and consumer protection laws. Another peer reviewer detailed the coordination committee on market

surveillance in Morocco as a mechanism for facilitating interministerial cooperation. The reviewer shared national experiences in engaging consumer associations and businesses in policymaking, through consultative bodies and public consultations on new regulations prior to adoption. To foster a culture of consumer protection, the reviewer suggested that Governments should raise awareness among consumers and strengthen consumer associations through financial support and adequate training. Another peer reviewer detailed the consumer protection means of relevant authorities in the United States, including law enforcement, complaints-handling, outreach and consumer education activities, to support disadvantaged consumers, and collaboration with civil society organizations. The reviewer stated that civil penalties could act as a strong deterrent to unlawful conduct. With regard to transactions through social networks, the reviewer stressed the aim of the agency to end the practice of making misleading claims on social media and the non-disclosure of paid endorsements by digital influencers. Finally, with regard to coordinating overlapping consumer protection mandates between agencies, the reviewer highlighted the use of cooperation agreements and memorandums of understanding with other agencies.

32. During the ensuing discussion, the representative of one regional group detailed the safety gate system in the European Union, which facilitated information-sharing and regional collaboration. One delegate noted the platform in Brazil for online dispute resolution.

33. The UNCTAD secretariat presented a proposal for a technical assistance project to implement the peer review recommendations, with the overall goal of assisting Gabon in enhancing consumer protection legislation and policy and strengthening the institutional framework.

I. Review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on consumer protection law and policy (Agenda item 9)

34. Under the agenda item, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy held one round-table discussion. In opening the discussion, the UNCTAD secretariat presented the background document on the review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on competition and consumer protection laws and policies (TD/B/C.I/CPLP/36–TD/B/C.I/CLP/71). The panel was composed of the following: Secretary of Commerce, Ministry of Economy, Argentina; Chief Executive Officer, Competition and Consumer Authority, Botswana; Consumer Protection Director, Ministry of Economy and Trade, Lebanon; and Secretary-General, Consumer Unity and Trust Society International.

35. The first panellist highlighted international cooperation activities with regard to consumer protection conducted in Latin America, including the annual International Consumer Protection Forum jointly organized with UNCTAD. Such activities focused on topics such as digital platforms, online dispute resolution, consumer overindebtedness and product safety. The panellist stressed the importance of international cooperation and commended the role of UNCTAD in providing an international forum.

36. The second panellist detailed the involvement of UNCTAD in the development of the consumer protection law in Botswana, through technical assistance such as training courses and the voluntary peer review of competition law and policy. The panellist welcomed continued technical assistance from UNCTAD and outlined areas in need of support.

37. The third panellist provided an overview of consumer protection in Lebanon and current work on digitalizing the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The panellist referred to experience with UNCTAD capacity-building support through a technical cooperation project in the Middle East and North Africa. In addition, the panellist requested additional technical assistance to help with legislative work, provide training and support the region.

38. The fourth panellist discussed challenges in promoting sustainable consumption and policies related to environment-friendly products, highlighting the need for advocacy to place consumer protection on the agenda in other policy areas, such as competition and trade. The panellist welcomed continued collaboration with UNCTAD in conducting research on

emerging consumer challenges, facilitating knowledge-sharing and providing capacity-building workshops, focused on digitalization and green technologies.

39. During the ensuing discussion, some delegates shared experiences with UNCTAD technical assistance. One delegate commended the impact of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection. Another delegate requested that UNCTAD organize events in more countries in the Middle East and North Africa. One delegate suggested that UNCTAD could strengthen its monitoring and review mechanism for technical cooperation.

J. Closing plenary

40. The keynote speaker, a Commissioner, Federal Trade Commission, United States, stated that economic liberty was a constant pursuit that required evolving regulations and enforcement, to protect consumers while allowing honest and innovative businesses to compete. She highlighted effective enforcement tools in deterring wrongdoing by businesses, such as innovative remedies, asking settling firms to inform consumers and holding senior executives in firms accountable for legal violations. The Federal Trade Commission also used research, policy statements, rulemaking and education to complement case-by-case enforcement. The Commissioner highlighted examples of the multipronged approach to addressing emerging issues in technology markets, such as those related to dark commercial patterns, artificial intelligence, repair restrictions, the gig economy and data-related abuses. In concluding her remarks, the Commissioner stressed that the Federal Trade Commission deployed all available tools to protect consumers, and valued collaboration with peer agencies and international partners.

41. One delegate stressed the deficient access services at the Palais des Nations on the morning of 3 July 2023.

III. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers (Agenda item 1)

42. At its opening plenary meeting on 3 July 2023, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy elected Ms. Quynh Anh Nguyen (Viet Nam) as its Chair and Mr. Juan Marcelo Estigarribia López (Paraguay) as its Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur.

B. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (Agenda item 2)

43. Also at its opening plenary meeting on 3 July 2023, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy adopted the provisional agenda of the session (TD/B/C.I/CPLP/33), as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Report on the implementation of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection by member States and relevant stakeholders.
4. Latest developments in legal and institutional frameworks: UNCTAD world consumer protection map.
5. Reports of the working groups on:
 - (a) Consumer product safety;
 - (b) Consumer protection in electronic commerce;

- (c) Consumer protection and gender.
- 6. Building trust in digital markets through enhanced consumer protection on online platforms.
- 7. Consumer protection and the transition to clean energy.
- 8. Voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy: Gabon.
- 9. Review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on consumer protection law and policy.
- 10. Provisional agenda of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.
- 11. Adoption of the report of the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.

C. Provisional agenda of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy
(Agenda item 10)

44. At its closing plenary meeting on 4 July 2023, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy approved the provisional agenda of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy (annex I).

D. Adoption of the report of the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy
(Agenda item 11)

45. Also at its closing plenary meeting on 4 July 2023, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy authorized the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur to finalize the report after the conclusion of the session.

Annex I

Provisional agenda of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Report on the implementation of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection by member States and relevant stakeholders.
4. Latest developments in legal and institutional frameworks: UNCTAD world consumer protection map.
5. Reports of the working groups on:
 - (a) Consumer product safety;
 - (b) Consumer protection in electronic commerce;
 - (c) Consumer protection and gender.
6. Enhancing the consumer movement: Means to facilitate the development of independent consumer groups.
7. Round table on protecting consumers as tourists.
8. Voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy.*
9. Review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on consumer protection law and policy.
10. Provisional agenda of the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.
11. Adoption of the report of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.

* Member State to be determined.

Annex II

Attendance**

1. Representatives of the following States members of the Conference attended the session:

Angola	Egypt	Oman	Thailand
Argentina	Gabon	Pakistan	Trinidad and Tobago
Armenia	Gambia	Papua New Guinea	Tunisia
Australia	Georgia	Paraguay	Türkiye
Austria	Germany	Peru	Uganda
Barbados	Honduras	Philippines	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Bhutan	India	Poland	United Republic of Tanzania
Botswana	Indonesia	Portugal	United States of America
Brazil	Iraq	Republic of Korea	Uruguay
Bulgaria	Ireland	Russian Federation	Uzbekistan
Burkina Faso	Italy	Rwanda	Viet Nam
Cabo Verde	Japan	Saudi Arabia	Zimbabwe
Canada	Kenya	Seychelles	
China	Lebanon	South Africa	
Colombia	Malaysia	Spain	
Congo	Mauritius	Sri Lanka	
Côte d'Ivoire	Mexico	State of Palestine	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Morocco	Sweden	
Dominican Republic	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	Switzerland	
	Nigeria		

2. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the session:

Caribbean Community
Common Fund for Commodities
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
Commonwealth Secretariat
Economic Community of West African States
Eurasian Economic Commission
European Union
General Secretariat of the Andean Community
West African Economic and Monetary Union

3. The following specialized agencies and related organizations were represented at the session:

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
United Nations Capital Development Fund
World Intellectual Property Organization

4. The following non-governmental organizations were represented at the session:

General category

Consumer Unity and Trust Society International
Consumers International
Global Traders Conference
International Federation of Beekeepers' Associations
International Institute for Sustainable Development

** This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/C.I/CPLP/INF.7.