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Safe products for all consumers

Parallel event

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1.   In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD emphasized that product safety was a fundamental right for consumers. He noted progress made, while highlighting persistent gaps; for example, 87 per cent of recalled or banned products remained available online and 44 per cent of member States lacked sufficient legal frameworks to ensure product safety. 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, held in July 2025, had invited the General Assembly to consider the adoption of the draft resolution on consumer product safety, which included the United Nations principles for consumer product safety. The Deputy Secretary-General highlighted that the principles stressed the need for stronger regulation, transparency and international cooperation.

2.   In his address, the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection of the European Commission, stated that ensuring product safety in interconnected global markets was a shared responsibility. He reaffirmed the commitment of the European Union to supporting the implementation of the United Nations principles for consumer product safety.

3.   The parallel event, following opening remarks by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD and an address by the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection of the European Commission, featured five panellists: Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Portugal; Superintendent of Industry and Commerce, Colombia; Acting Commissioner, National Consumer Commission, South Africa; Director General, Consumers International; and Deputy to the Director for Consumers, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission. The Head, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD, moderated the discussion.

4.   One panellist emphasized trust as the foundation of international trade and the driver of market expansion, noting that product safety empowered consumers and promoted more responsible consumption patterns, benefiting both people and the planet. The panellist highlighted that Portugal partnered with UNCTAD in order to assist Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, namely, Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe, as well as Timor-Leste.

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5.   Another panellist presented the legal framework for product safety in Colombia, which set clear obligations and provided legal certainty and effective oversight. She highlighted an agreement with a digital platform in order to block the sale of hazardous products and enable their recall; and bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries.

6.   One panellist emphasized the central role of UNCTAD in providing a platform for the exchange of ideas on consumer protection among member States, noting that the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection had inspired consumer protection legislation worldwide, including in South Africa in 2008. The panellist highlighted the role of regional economic organizations and national authorities in consumer protection; the need to strengthen cooperation in product safety; and the importance of the promotion of a compliance culture among the business community.

7.   Another panellist emphasized the importance of strong product safety frameworks in building trust and resilience among consumers. She highlighted gaps in legislation and enforcement related to emerging technologies, stressing the need to integrate sustainability, mental health and gender-related considerations into product safety. In addition, the panellist underlined the critical role of consumer groups in shaping standards, despite limited resources.

8.   One panellist summarized international cooperation lessons from the consensus-building process leading to the draft resolution on consumer product safety, currently under consideration by the General Assembly. The panellist noted that a pressing need and shared interest in having a global product safety framework had provided a foundation for collective action in preparing the draft resolution; and that cooperation and goodwill could translate into progress for all.

9.   During the ensuing discussion, one participant highlighted private sector collaboration with consumer groups, safety policies and the use of machine-learning to detect unsafe products, stressing the need for public–private cooperation. The representatives of some consumer groups stressed the need for broader definitions of products, to include digital goods and services, and for global cooperation in addressing emerging online safety risks. Another participant referred to the convergence of neurotechnology, artificial intelligence and consumer protection, highlighting the need for future norms for emerging technologies.

10.   As next steps, the panellists referred to their expectation of the adoption of the United Nations principles for consumer product safety and stressed their commitment to implementing the principles. Some panellists underlined the importance of technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries, noting the need for UNCTAD assistance in addressing skills and capacity gaps. The panellists agreed on the need for strengthened international cooperation. One panellist emphasized that safe products and consumer protection were the cornerstones of human-centred fair development and allowed for the equitable sharing of the benefits of globalization. Another panellist emphasized the need for stronger cross-border cooperation and faster information-sharing, to address risks in global online marketplaces, and for Governments to invest in consumer groups, since their knowledge could support policymakers.