

Report of Representation

19th Consumer International's World Congress

Hong Kong, May 03-07, 2011

George Cheriyan (Director, CUTS) represented CUTS International in the 19th Consumers International World Congress and General Assembly on the theme 'Empowering Tomorrow's Consumers' held in Hong Kong, during May 03-06, 2011.

1. Background

Consumers International (CI) is the independent apex consumer organization and the global voice for consumers, having 220 member organisations in 115 countries. CI's 19th World Congress on the theme 'Empowering Tomorrow's Consumers' was held at Hong Kong Conference and Exhibition Centre during May 03-06, 2011. The Hong Kong Consumer Council (HKCC), a member of CI since 1976, was the local host. The CI World Congress



occurs every four to five years. It includes the World Congress and the General Assembly where CI's President, Executive and CI's council members are elected. The last Congress took place in Sydney in 2007. The CI's World Congress was previously held in Hong Kong in 1991. Over 700 delegates from more than 60 countries have taken part in the Congress. In terms of participation, HK WC was the biggest ever. Climate Change and Financial Consumer Protection was high on the agenda.

2. Fringe Event on 'Consumer Protection in Financial Services

Several fringe events were held with on May 03, 2011. Cheriyan attended the fringe event with Financial Services Board and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on 'Consumer Protection in Financial Services'. Cheriyan participated in the discussions and mentioned about the status of financial consumer protection and regulatory bodies in financial sector in India. He also raised the point about the recent move of Government of India to keep mergers and acquisitions in the banking sector out of the purview of the Competition Act that will be regulated by the Banking Regulation Act. It is a major set back in comparison to the initiatives at the international level for encouraging competition in the Banking Sector for financial inclusion and better consumer protection.



3. Proceedings

Formal Inaugural Ceremony

Hon Donald Tsang, Chief Executive, Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong was the Chief Guest, who delivered the inaugural address. He spoke about HK's commitment to the free flow of information, and the role of NGOs and free media. CI President Samuel Ochieng spoke about CI's successes in putting consumer protection in financial services at the heart of the G20 agenda, strengthening the WHO's work on marketing of junk food to children and successfully contributing to the recent completion of the ISO standard on corporate social responsibility. The opening ceremony concluded with a fantastic 'Lion Dance', which is a form of traditional Chinese dance.



Participating in the discussions in the Plenary session 'Towards fair financial markets' in response to the main speech by Sue Rutledge (SR), Coordinator for Global Program on Consumer Protection and Financial Literacy, The World Bank, George said access to formal financial services is still a big problem in countries like India. Only 40 percent people own a check in account in India. Further, he raised a question about the financial protection mechanisms that World Bank is insisting while doing lending with governments.

He moderated a small group comprising consumer organisations from Japan, South Korea and India in the sub-plenary session on 'What next for CI's financial services campaign?' which made several recommendations.

General Assembly

The General Assembly was held on May 06, 2011 Cheriyan participated in the discussions and raised the need for regional focus for CI's head campaigns.



Asia Pacific Regional Meeting

A meeting of CI member organisations was held on May 06, 2011. George participated actively in the discussions to finalise the plan of action for CI Kuala Lumpur Office and made several suggestions. He also suggested having a plan to make use of the expertise and strengths of member organisations for enhancing the capacity of other CI members. CUTS can share expertise on competition and regulation and refer to the Beijing conference on competition scheduled in June 2011.

4. Highlights

- A global event putting ‘consumer protection’ back to the international priority agenda, marking with 25 years of UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection
- A well organised mega event without any flaws in the event management as well as in the logistics
- Excellent opportunity to network and meet with consumer activists from across the world
- Provided new insights about future consumer issues/challenges

5. Key Messages for the Future

- Move from ‘Independence’ to ‘Interdependence’
- Use the power of ‘connected’ for the betterment of consumers, including campaigns, warning/signaling companies, mobilising social capital/fund raising etc.
- Move from ‘network’ to ‘networked’