

## WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY

### Minister's Speech

Theme: Antibiotics off the menu

Today, March 15, 2016, Saint Lucia joins the rest of the world in celebrating World Consumer Rights Day. Several days in our calendar year have been assigned by various international bodies to focus our attention on matters of significance to the development of humanity. However, today, World Consumer Rights Day, is an extraordinary one which began as far back as 1983. Consumers are recognized as a valuable economic group with rights and responsibilities that need to be promoted and protected. The Government of Saint Lucia holds firm to that belief. And we will continue, through the work of our various Government Departments and Agencies, to put the necessary legislative framework and procedures in place to ensure that transactions between consumers and businesses are based on the fundamentals of fairness and transparency, whilst protecting our consumers' safety and that of the environment we live in.

Fellow Saint Lucians, you may be aware that the Ministry of Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs has already begun making major strides in boosting the legislative framework governing consumer/supplier relations. In 2009, the Credit Sales Act was passed and now as we come to the close of this financial year, we are at an advanced stage of enacting the much discussed Consumer Protection Bill. This exercise has taken us decades of continuous dialogue and reviews to get the legislation before Parliament, and I am very elated that it was finally presented to the Upper and Lower House in February of this year.

The new Consumer Protection legislation will address matters pertaining to:

Contractual arrangements between Consumers and Suppliers;

The obligations of Consumers and that of Suppliers of Goods and Services in transacting business with each other;

The Structure of the Agencies with responsibility for receiving and investigating consumer complaints and dealing with redress matters; and

The authority and responsibilities of an Appeals Tribunal should a matter be appealed.

I take this opportunity to extend heartfelt thanks to all parties, inclusive of the National Consumers Association St. Lucia Inc., that were instrumental in the consultative process to ensure that this important legislation was taken to Parliament.

As is customary, Consumers International, which is the largest, not-for-profit organization based in the UK, championing the cause for Consumers worldwide, this year, released a theme which highlights a major concern to consumers globally. This year's theme "Antibiotics Off the Menu" is making a special plea to those involved in the use of antibiotics in foods. The concern is that Antibiotics used in human medicine should only be used to treat sick animals but not for growth of animals, feed efficiency or routine disease prevention. According to research conducted in the field of Antimicrobial resistance, there is a concern that the continuous use of antibiotics in food can lead to antibiotic resistance which causes bacteria to become resistant to treatment administered to humans. This theme is very appropriate at this time, as it brings to the forefront,

the global call for Food Security, Health and Well Being, which are all major strategic issues that have a direct bearing on all economic groups.

My Ministry, the Ministry of Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs as the name suggests, has a unique function to support the development of businesses and facilitate their transactions, while safeguarding consumers through consumer empowerment. The Ministry is therefore obligated to develop and pursue, in conjunction with sister agencies and Ministries, the right policy mix that would create a fair trading environment for the benefit of all. Each one of us is a consumer in our own right. It is therefore crucial to recognize the importance of both economic groups and their diverse needs. The Ministry of Commerce has already begun repositioning itself to address these diverse needs in this very dynamic market. In order to do so, we recognize that we must become a vibrant, proactive, collaborative institution, which is supportive to the needs of all our businesses and consumers.

The Theme “Antibiotics Off the Menu” indeed calls for a collaborative effort of a number of agencies, particularly those with responsibility for Health, Agriculture, Sustainable Development, Commerce, Business Development, Investment and Consumer Affairs, in conjunction with the relevant Private Sector Agencies. The potential impact of antibiotics in the food we eat on the health of our people is worrisome.

We are reminded of the saying “a healthy nation is a wealthy nation”. As a Government, we must therefore, at every opportunity, seek to ensure that the policies that are established will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of all.

I believe that much can be accomplished by teamwork. To ensure that we have a fair trading environment in which businesses flourish and consumers’ welfare is upheld, requires the collaborative efforts of all relevant parties. This means that Governmental Ministries/Agencies and Non-governmental agencies, Civil Society must dialogue with each other, and work in tandem to be able to achieve the desired environment in which we would like to co-exist.

**HAPPY WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY TO ALL!!!!**

**I THANK YOU.**