We became a powerful and respected voice of consumers globally as never before. A voice that not only challenged the largest corporations and won, but also engaged the UN system in ways never seen before to achieve real results for real people.

Anwar Fazal IOCU/Consumers International President, 1978 - 1984
CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL - OUR VISION

‘Our vision is a world where people have access to safe and sustainable goods and services, exercising their individual rights as consumers and using the force of their collective power for the good of consumers everywhere.’
Consumers International

THE STORY OF A TRULY GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Consumers International (CI), formerly known as the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU), was started in 1960 on a wing and a prayer by a group of five consumer organisations from the US, Western Europe and Australia.

Originally established as a global information exchange between the increasing number of consumer product-testing organisations that had sprung up in the post-war boom years, CI quickly established a formidable reputation as an agent for change on the consumer issues of the day.

In 10 short years, we had attracted 50 member organisations. Another decade later, we had achieved General Consultative Status at the United Nations (UN) – having helped wage and win major campaigns against transnational companies over issues relating to baby food and pesticides.

Our history has taken us from the US and Europe to Asia and Latin America, through Eastern Europe and across Africa. Today, we have more than 225 member organisations in 115 countries, and we continue to grow.

CI’s priorities and programmes have evolved to reflect greater involvement in issues ranging from public utilities and food and drug safety, to the environment and credit and debt that affect consumers everywhere.

What has not changed is CI’s commitment to building a powerful international movement to protect and empower all consumers.

As CI celebrates its 50th year, we have an organisation of which we can be justly proud. I’d like to invite you to share in some of our successes and our ambitions for the future.

Samuel Ochieng, President, Consumers International
March 1960 represents a landmark in the development of the world consumer movement. Meeting in The Hague, delegates representing consumer groups from different parts of the world completed the organisation of the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU), later to become Consumers International (CI).

The five non-profit consumer organisations that initiated this effort - and whose ongoing support continues to be crucial to CI’s success today - were: Consumers Union, US; Consumers’ Association (Which?), UK; Nederlandse Consumentenbond, Netherlands; Union Belge des Consommateurs (Tests Achats), Belgium; and the Australian Consumers’ Association (Choice).

IOCU initially acted to unite those consumer groups wanting to help ordinary people make informed buying decisions as post-war consumerism took hold, but it soon developed its role as an international backer, giving consumer groups the collective power that they lacked individually, particularly in tackling laws weighted in favour of industry.

IOCU was intent upon growing its membership and in assisting newly formed groups across the world, while taking care to ensure the members’ independence from business interests. This principle still holds true today – member organisations must operate exclusively in the consumer interest, and be free from political parties or cash subsidies. They must be non-profit-making and non-commercial.

Soon IOCU began communicating via member newsletters and biennial conferences, and it spoke of a wider consumer agenda that included the need to address issues such as poverty, access to basic goods and services, and the challenges faced by consumers in developing countries.

Although membership continued to increase, resources remained extremely tight. However, in 1968, IOCU adopted a new constitution – passing power from the founding organisations to a voting membership, and increasing the fees. This made more money available and it created the opportunity for participation by organisations that did not fit the model of the founders, in particular, those beginning to emerge in developing countries where consumer education and advocacy about basic access were the main concern.

Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>16 members</td>
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<td>International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU) founded at the Kurhaus Hotel, The Hague, March 1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>US President John F Kennedy sends a message to US Congress asserting the basic rights of consumers</td>
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‘A new social institution, the consumer testing movement, now makes its bow on the international scene. Organised consumers have joined in a mutual effort… to bring truth to the marketplace and a better balance to the economy.’

Colston Warne, IOCU president, 1960-1970

In the early 1970s, a regional office was created in Malaysia, serving Asia and the Pacific. Its advisory committee came from India, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji and the Philippines – a very different stakeholder group from the founders of IOCU itself. This decision was to prove critical in the history of the international consumer movement.

A Bold Move Comes Good
The model for the new Asia Pacific office was to promote consumer organisations through technical assistance, training and information sharing.

But the man appointed to head it seized the moment to create something very different. Anwar Fazal was an energetic and persuasive leader, full of ideas. Over the next decade, he made the Asia Pacific office the epicentre of IOCU.

With an entirely new approach, Anwar sought to target transnational corporations with specific campaigns, engaging organisations in both developed and developing countries. He took IOCU into new ways of campaigning and advocacy by playing a leading role in setting up issue-based networks – such as the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), Pesticide Action Network (PAN) and Health Action International (HAI) – which included partners from outside the consumer movement.

The Asia Pacific office also established Consumer Interpol, through which members exchanged information on products banned in one country but shipped to unsuspecting consumers elsewhere. This project led to lobbying at the UN for a global list of banned products, and it succeeded in 1983 when the UN began publishing the Consolidated List of Products Banned, Withdrawn, Severely Restricted or Not Approved by Governments.
Meanwhile, the consumer movement continued to grow and the membership of IOCU doubled to 150, in more than 50 countries, by the mid-1980s.

This was partly the result of IOCU’s own capacity-building efforts but it was also due to significant global developments, such as economic growth in some countries and new opportunities for civil society organisations in others.


**The Need for a Global Consumer Voice**

IOCU began tentative work in Latin America and the Caribbean in the early 1980s, publishing a Latin American newsletter through its member organisation in Mexico from 1981 and eventually opening a regional office in Uruguay in 1986.

At the same time, IOCU created a global management structure, with the low-key executive secretary role being replaced by that of director general, in 1983.

By then, the Soviet Union had collapsed, and Central and Eastern Europe were converting to market economies, increasing the need for strong consumer organisations.

As the 1990s progressed, IOCU was managing extensive capacity-building programmes across the world, training in methods such as institutional management, research and fundraising as well as in specific issues. By 2000, membership numbers increased to more than 225 from 115 countries. The consumer movement had indeed become global.

Advocacy began to focus on international trade negotiations, particularly those of the newly formed World Trade Organization (WTO).
IOCU also increased its work at the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (food standards), as international standards became the reference point for disputes about artificial barriers to trade.

These developments in global governance made it increasingly difficult for individual countries to adopt national standards that were different from those agreed internationally, thus increasing the need for global consumer views to be heard.

“We need to create a new paradigm of development and happiness that can generate a three-dimensional peace – peace with ourselves, peace with other people and peace with mother earth. Little people doing little things in little places everywhere can change the world.”

Anwar Fazal, IOCU president, 1978-1984

Other issues also emerged from the trade agenda, including the impact of patent and copyright protection on consumer access to Aids drugs and other essential medicines. It was clear that a powerful international consumer movement, as demonstrated by IOCU, was needed more than ever.

**IOCU becomes Consumers International**

By the late 1990s, a much-altered organisation was in place, and this was marked by a change of name from IOCU to Consumers International (CI), in 1995.

Campaigning and member development were now a particular priority in Central and Eastern Europe and in Africa. In the former, CI helped create a sustainable consumer presence, almost from scratch, in countries struggling with democracy, the transition to market economies and the demands of preparation for joining the EU. CI now has 32 members in countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

| 1975 | 95 members |
| 1977 | CI gains General Consultative Status at the UN, the highest level of engagement available to NGOs |
| 1978 | 105 members |
| 1979 | IOCU coordinates the creation of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) |
As CI’s work on these issues continued through the 2000s, its range of campaign targets and techniques developed. Critical engagement with transnational corporations increased, but so did demands for corporate accountability and responsibility. Campaigning took on deceptive marketing of pharmaceuticals and the promotion of junk food to children. New communication techniques, such as email discussion groups, project-specific websites and campaign films were used to raise awareness and engage with members.

Today, the founding principles of the movement still energise and inspire people and organisations throughout the CI membership. The focus has broadened to address poverty reduction, corporate responsibility, services, sustainable consumption and climate change as well as providing advice on consumer products. As we look towards the next 50 years, our commitment to campaigning, advocacy and engagement continues to grow.
World Consumer Rights Day

World Consumer Rights Day has been held annually on 15 March since 1983. The day was proposed to honour former US President John F Kennedy’s historic speech to the US Congress 20 years earlier. President Kennedy became the first world leader to formally address the issue of consumer rights, giving an address that continues to inspire the work of CI today.

To the Congress of the United States:

Consumers, by definition, include us all. They are the largest economic group in the economy, affecting and affected by almost every public and private economic decision. Two-thirds of all spending in the economy is by consumers. But they are the only important group in the economy who are not effectively organized, whose views are often not heard.

President Kennedy went on to outline four consumer rights:

1 The right to safety – to be protected against products, production processes and services, which are hazardous to health or life

2 The right to be informed – to be given the facts needed to make an informed choice, and to be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling

3 The right to choose – to be able to select from a range of products and services, offered at competitive prices, with an assurance of satisfactory quality

4 The right to be heard – to have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy, and in the development of products and services.

To these, CI later added another four rights:

5 The right to satisfaction of basic needs – to have access to basic, essential goods and services; adequate food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, public utilities, water and sanitation

6 The right to redress – to receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services

7 The right to consumer education – to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities and how to act on them

8 The right to a healthy environment – to live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the well being of present and future generations.

This set of eight consumer rights now guide the campaign and policy work of CI and consumer organisations the world over.
HOW CI HAS LED THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT

1 Campaigning
CI has been a pioneer of a new method of campaigning for NGOs, using high-profile techniques to mobilise disparate groups on a particular issue for a particular purpose – targeting influential figures within governments and at the heart of industry, to bring about much-needed change. As a result of these tactics, CI is recognised as one of the leading campaigners in the international NGO community.

These methods have brought results. Among them, the seminal international document of the consumer movement – the United Nations Guidelines on Consumer Protection – was adopted by the UN, in 1985, after 10 years of CI campaigning. This gave important legitimacy to the principles of consumer rights and practical support for developing national consumer protection legislation. Numerous countries have adopted laws based on this model.

The three global networks IBFAN, HAI and PAN were CI’s first long-term partnerships with groups outside its own membership, and prime examples of this pioneering campaigning activity. They helped to combine the expertise and energy of many groups into a single, vigorous and knowledgeable voice in the fight to set minimum acceptable norms for the protection of consumers globally.

IBFAN
‘Bottles, not bullets, are causing the deaths of one million babies each year.’

In 1979, IOCU and other citizens’ groups formed the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) to eradicate the death and disease affecting millions of Developing World babies as a result of consuming bottle-fed formula milk.

After intense campaigning by IBFAN, including organising consumer boycotts against the likes of Nestlé, whose subtle yet effective campaigns were undermining breast feeding, the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, adopted the International Code of Marketing on Breast Milk Substitutes – the first such code designed to control widespread marketing abuses by baby food companies.

1992 | 177 members

1993
IOCJ head office moves from The Hague to London

1994
IOCJ Africa office opens in Zimbabwe
HAI
CI co-founded Health Action International (HAI), in 1981. An informal network of some 120 consumer and public interest groups, HAI engaged in worldwide campaigns for the safe, rational and economic use of pharmaceuticals. At the 41st World Health Assembly in 1987, HAI organised a large lobby of delegates to urge stronger controls on advertising by the drugs industry.

Drug exports by European Economic Community (EEC) member states were studied by HAI Europe, as many drugs were being shipped to developing countries after being banned for sale in Europe. HAI participants built a campaign against this potentially hazardous double standard and received broad support from virtually all major political groups in the European Parliament.

PAN
The unchecked spread and misuse of deadly pesticides led to IOCU’s co-founding of the Pesticide Action Network (Pan), in 1982. Uniting more than 300 organisations in some 50 countries, PAN campaigned against toxic pesticides and unethical marketing practices, whilst promoting effective controls and, wherever possible, safe alternatives.

Despite strong opposition from pesticide-exporting companies, Pan succeeded in preventing the export of banned or restricted pesticides without the knowledge and consent of governments in importing countries.
2 Representation
An essential part of IOCU’s, and then CI’s, work has been representing the consumer interest at the United Nations and elsewhere. Formal representation gave the organisation an influential voice on issues and decisions of global importance.

For example, in the early 2000s, some GM foods were found to contain unexpected toxins and allergens and they differed nutritionally from unmodified versions. CI representation at standard-setting meetings (of the Codex Alimentarius Commission) resulted in the adoption of a strong global standard for assessing GM safety, which is now the gold standard for national food safety agencies.

CI representatives are currently seeking a WHO code on the marketing of junk food to children, to offer a benchmark for evaluating how manufacturers promote unhealthy food to children.

And since 1999, CI’s London Office has provided a home to the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD), a forum for all the major consumer organisations in the European Union and the United States to provide advice to top officials of their governments on product safety standards, financial regulation and other key consumer issues.

3 Building the consumer movement
From its earliest days, CI has been a bedrock of the consumer movement, helping organisations launch from scratch and giving them the tools to flourish on their own.

CI helps with everything from capacity building and lobbying support, to networking and training. To that end, one of its hallmark programmes is the Rhoda Karpatkin Advocate Programme.

The Rhoda Karpatkin Advocate Programme was established after its namesake retired in 2001, with the purpose of developing the skills and experience of the next generation of campaigning advocates from CI member organisations in developing countries.

Rhoda, who served as president of Consumers Union from 1974 to 2001, and as President of CI from 1984 to 1991, was committed to building consumer organisations in developing countries and to mobilising consumer groups to fight for consumer rights and social justice. The programme, funded by CU, is designed to support CI’s strategic objective of ‘building strong consumer organisations around the world that can campaign effectively for consumers nationally and through CI globally’.

‘...Consumers International and ISO, the International Organization of Standardization, have collaborated increasingly to identify areas where International Standards could assist and to raise the involvement of consumer interests in their development... The global relevance of ISO standards, and their usefulness for consumers, can only gain from this collaboration with CI and its network of national consumer associations.’

Alan Bryden, ISO secretary general, 2003-2008

2000 | 225 members

2004
CI successfully campaigns for work to begin on a corporate social responsibility standard at the International Organization of Standardisation (ISO). CI succeeds in getting ISO to agree that consumers should be a distinct stakeholder group within ISO decision-making for the first time. *Membership in 115 countries*
A special relationship with the UN

On 10 April 1963, the United Nations Economic and Social Council granted consultative status to CI (known as IOCU at the time). This meant that CI became the main group representing the practical problems faced by consumers around the world.

This relationship also made it possible for CI to make contributions to the main UN agencies dealing with our health, the food that we eat and human and labour rights.

At the annual WHO Assembly and at Codex Alimentarius (the UN food standards agency), CI gained the right to speak alongside member nations in debates – often as the only voice for consumer rights.

CI pressure at the UN during the 1980s helped bring about a number of important measures. Among others, these were the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, the WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection, the UN Consolidated List of Banned or Restricted Products, and the WHO’s Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion.

Today, lobbying continues for the WHO to adopt an international code on the marketing of food to children.

2007
CI charter on sustainable access to energy published

2008
CI appointed to the UN Advisory Board on sustainable consumption to represent the global NGO community
CI publishes its recommendations for an international code on the marketing of food to children

2009
CI appointed as official NGO partner to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)
Leaders who have shaped Consumers International

Colston Warne

A visionary of the consumer movement for more than 50 years, spanning much of the 20th century. Economics professor at Amherst College in the US, a founder of Consumer Union (CU) in 1936 and its board chair from then until he retired in 1980. Starting in the 1950s, he was an energetic supporter of the development of consumer organisations in other countries. One of the founding signatories of IOCU in 1960, and its president for the first 10 years. As well as his own vision, drive and enthusiasm, he provided substantial financial and technical support from CU that was critical to IOCU’s early work.

Peter Goldman

The director of the UK’s Consumers’ Association (now Which?) from 1964 until 1987. Played a leading role in IOCU until his death in 1987. A principal architect of the transformation of IOCU, from a club of specialist publishers to an international membership organisation. Elected president of IOCU in 1970 and served until 1975. The Asia Pacific Office was set up during his period of office, helped by additional support from Which? (as well as Consumers Union). Was appointed director general of IOCU in 1987 after retirement from CA, but he died as he was taking up this new role.
Rhoda Karpatkin

Became president of Consumers Union in 1974, having previously been the organisation's legal counsel. Led CU until her retirement in 2001. Member of IOCU’s executive throughout this period and was president from 1984 to 1991. A passionate supporter of expanding the consumer movement in developing countries – the establishment of the Latin America Office, initial work towards the Africa Office and early exploration in Central and Eastern Europe took place during her presidency of IOCU. A founder and strong supporter of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue, in which she is still involved. Highly influential in maintaining the intellectual framework and practical expansion of the international consumer movement for more than three decades.

Anwar Fazal

One of the principal founders of Consumers Association of Penang, Malaysia, in 1969, before becoming the director of IOCU’s first regional office, for Asia and the Pacific, in 1974. Created programmes that addressed significant problems for consumers in developing countries for the first time; raised IOCU’s profile through his broad vision, his gifts for lobbying and as a speaker; gave IOCU a prominent role in the international NGO community by creating networks to work collectively on specific campaign issues; raised grant funds for the first time to support the networks and the expansion of IOCU’s work. Elected IOCU president from 1978 to 1984 and dominated the organisation in this period. Perhaps the most influential figure in the history of IOCU, creating an organisation that was vibrant and innovative at the time and laying the groundwork for working with a global membership in the 1990s.

Marilena Lazzarini

The first president from Latin America in CI’s history, elected in 2003. A tireless advocate in Brazil’s courts for enforcement of laws related to the growing and labelling of GM crops. Her campaign was critical to subsequent efforts all over the world to permit informed consumer choice and safe management of biotechnology. She was a founding member of Brazil’s first major consumer group, the Institute for Consumer Defense, in 1987, and was its executive coordinator from 1996-2003. From 2003 to 2007, she served as CI’s president and, during her tenure, she led a transition to a more dynamic and high-profile campaigning organisation.
These words, which are often used to describe dedicated marathon runners, sum up both the Consumers International (CI) heritage and our pledge for the future.

For anyone who has ever worked tirelessly on consumer issues, it is almost always a test of endurance. Victories are not won overnight, nor are they won in only one arena.

For 50 years, CI has waged battles in the corridors of parliaments and corporations, in the halls of international bodies and on the streets of our communities.

CI has brought to these battles the combined force of what is now more than 225 organisations in more than 115 countries – and the wisdom of decades of collective experience in lobbying, campaigning, and mobilising for change.

As a result, CI has been able to reduce consumers’ exposure to dangerous risks such as hazardous drugs, unsafe and unsuitable products, deceptive marketplace practices and much more.

And what about the next 50 years? As members of CI, we are committed to fighting as hard and as long as it takes to secure basic consumer rights for individuals and families, wherever they may live.

We are also committed to ensuring that consumers have a lasting voice as well as an impact in their local marketplaces and in the global marketplace.

There are still quality-of-life risks from the stark fact that too many people around the world lack access to necessities such as water, electricity, healthcare and other essential needs. They lack access to safe food, basic financial services and a fair and safe marketplace.

In developed countries, as well, too many consumers are victims of marketplace abuses, a lack of information to make informed choices, barriers to effectively exercising their consumer rights, and indifference, or worse, on the part of some corporate and governmental powerbrokers.

For people everywhere, there is the significant risk to the health of our planet if we fail to achieve sustainable consumption. We consume not only products and services, but valuable resources. With rights and responsibilities as citizens and consumers, we recognise the crucial balance of consumers being treated fairly and treating our planet fairly.

Finally, millions of consumers around the world, in developing and developed countries alike, still lack the power to seek – and receive – justice in the marketplace. We owe them our support.

While the international consumer movement lacks the money of profit-driven special interests, we make up for that difference with person power. And we gain strength from the diversity of our members.

CI, in the years ahead, will be the catalyst for building an ever more powerful global consumer movement that unites often disparate voices into one formidable force for change.

All of us who are part of CI today, and those who came before us, have helped member organisations stand up for the rights – and responsibilities – of consumers in their own countries and on the international stage.

We carry forward, with steadfast determination, the torch that has been handed to us from earlier leaders. With persistence, perseverance, endurance, and the courage to do what’s right, we will continue to advance the welfare of the world’s consumers.

James Guest, Vice President, Consumers International
50 years of the global consumer movement
IOCU/CI PRESIDENTS

1970 – 1975  Peter Goldman  |  Consumers’ Association, UK
1975 – 1978  Wily van Rijckeghem  |  Association des Consommateurs, Belgium
1978 – 1984  Anwar Fazal  |  Consumers Association of Penang, Malaysia
1991 – 1997  Erna Witoelar  |  Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia
1997 – 2000  Pamela Chan  |  Hong Kong Consumer Council
2000 – 2003  Louise Sylvan  |  Australian Consumers’ Association
2003 – 2007  Marilena Lazzarini  |  Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor
2007 – present  Samuel Ochieng  |  Consumer Information Network, Kenya

Acknowledgements

Together with the many figures mentioned in this booklet, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have given their time, support and invaluable energy to Consumers International over the past 50 years. Our thanks and gratitude go out to all those who have had a hand in helping CI reach its 50th birthday.

Our thanks also go to Julian Edwards, former director general of CI, for his help in producing this booklet.

About Consumers International

Consumers International (CI) is the only independent global campaigning voice for consumers. With over 225 member organisations in more than 115 countries, we are building a powerful international consumer movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere.

Consumers International is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee in the UK (company number 4337856) and a registered charity (number 1122155).

For more information, visit
www.consumersinternational.org

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