



The Consumer Agenda for Fair Mobile Services

Introduction

As mobile technology has become ubiquitous, mobile telecommunications have transformed from just being telephones that enable us to talk and text, to a technology with the ability to interact with a global information commons. With nearly seven billion subscriptions to mobile networks¹, phones are an essential part of many people's daily lives and increasingly play a pivotal role in development.

However, amidst the success of mobile telecommunications, consumers are confronted with an expanding number of challenges and concerns. The quality, reliability, accessibility, fairness and even integrity of mobile services are increasingly questioned and there is a resounding need to address these problem areas for consumers around the globe.

Over the years, the emerging importance of mobile telecommunications has been recognised by the consumer movement. Consumers International (CI) engagement with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) on this issue goes back more than 15 years and in 2009, CI and a number of its Members signed the Chiang Rai Declaration², which states that *telecommunications must be treated as an essential service and a necessary learning tool*.

In consultation with CI Members and Supporters we have developed the **Consumer Agenda for Fair Mobile Services (Consumer Agenda)**. The Consumer Agenda sets out proposals to strengthen protection for mobile consumers and is addressed to the world's telecommunications providers, regulators and other stakeholders in the telecommunications industry.

The five-item Consumer Agenda aims to capture the issues that most affect consumers of mobile services:

1. Provide consumers with access to an affordable, reliable service.
2. Provide consumers with fair contracts explained in clear, complete and accessible language.
3. Provide consumers with fair and transparent billing.
4. Provide consumers with security and power over their own information.
5. Listen and respond to consumer complaints.

The Consumer Agenda is submitted to the ITU in light of its commitment to address consumer protection in telecommunications services as adopted through Resolution 64 of the fifth World Telecommunication Development Conference, which was held in Hyderabad, India in 2010.

CI commits to continue to represent the voice of mobile consumers worldwide. We will intensify our efforts to empower mobile consumers by educating and consulting them on various issues and concerns that affect consumer rights, and commit to make ourselves available to join mutually beneficial partnerships with ITU members to this end.

¹ See International Telecommunications Union (ITU), ICT Facts and Figures. <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013-e.pdf>

² Chiang Rai Declaration on Consumer Protection in Telecommunications, 30 July 2009. <http://a2knetwork.org/chiang-rai-declaration>.

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1. Basic telecommunications is an essential service; thus it should be available, affordable and accessible to all, without unnecessarily burdensome subscription processes or requirements, and it should meet a high standard of reliability. Consumers should be provided with a technical support system to assist them in resolving any technical problems concerning mobile services.
2. Mobile telephony contracts with consumers should always reflect fair provisions with all relevant, accurate, and updated information explained in a clear and accessible manner for consumers to exercise their right to make informed decisions with confidence and based on their needs.

Contracts should not allow providers to inhibit or obstruct the termination of the contract after expiration of the contract term, nor prevent consumers from using devices purchased under contract on other mobile telephony networks after the device has been fully paid off. Regulators should mandate mobile number portability (MNP) to further reduce consumers' switching costs and increase competition.

3. Consumers should be protected from unfair billing practices by ensuring that they are well-informed of the services, charges and rates before they commence using any mobile product or service. All charges should be broken down into detail to ensure transparency and integrity of billing information, and comply with the International Standards Organisation (ISO) standard 14452 on network services billing.

Consumers call for the enhancement of connectivity and affordability of roaming services. Consumers support appropriate regulation of telecommunication providers to enhance transparency of roaming prices and reduce roaming costs. We support development of policies that will ensure quality and fairness in pricing of roaming services that would benefit the consumers as stated in Article 4 of the International Telecommunications Regulations³ developed during the World Conference on International Telecommunications in 2012.

4. Availing mobile services also means entrusting personal data. There should be clear protection guidelines and mechanisms against any malicious usage or unauthorised solicitation of a consumer's information. Consumers should have the utmost control on how their information can be utilised and this should be respected by all stakeholders in the telecommunications industry. In cases where the personal data of mobile consumers has been compromised, the incident should be properly reported immediately and the consumers should be provided proper redress.

Mobile operators who provide mobile payment, money transfer or banking services should adopt and implement relevant financial consumer protection standards developed by international standards organisations working in liaison with ITU, such as ISO and other recognised forums such as OECD. Examples of relevant documents being developed are ISO 12812 Mobile payments and the OECD guidelines on mobile and online payments.

5. Mobile consumers should be able to seek individual and collective redress through a just, practical, inexpensive and accessible process at any given time and situation. To meet this requirement providers should have complaint systems that comply with ISO standard 10002 Customer satisfaction and complaints handling and regulatory procedures and policies should be established in order to address the concerns of consumers.

All telecommunications industry stakeholders (telecommunications providers, governments, regulators and consumers) should work together towards strengthening mobile consumer protection. Consumers should be given voice in all policy discussions and engagements concerning mobile telecommunications.

³ See International Telecommunications Regulations, 3-4 December, 2012. <http://www.itu.int/en/wcit-12/Documents/final-acts-wcit-12.pdf>.