

Consumers In The New Millennium: Back To Basics

by
DATO' (DR.) ANWAR FAZAL
*Senior Regional Advisor of
The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI),
United Nations Development
Programme (UNDP)*

*This speech was given by
Dato' (Dr.) Anwar Fazal at the
Inaugural Public Lecture
on World Consumer Rights Day,
March 15th 2001 at the Tun Muhammad
Suffian Auditorium, University of
Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

Published by:



**FEDERATION OF MALAYSIAN CONSUMERS
ASSOCIATIONS (FOMCA)**

No. 1D-1, Bangunan SKPPK

Jalan SS9A/ 17

47300 Petaling Jaya

Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Tel : 03-78762009

Fax : 03-78771076

Email : fomca@po.jaring.my

The Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (FOMCA) is a voluntary, non-profit, non-political and civic organisation that champions for the rights and interests of all consumers through research, education, advocacy and representational activities.

ISBN 983-40315-2-1



Printed by:

Percetakan T.S. (M) Sdn. Bhd.

Public Lecture

CONSUMERS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM – BACK TO BASICS

15th March 2001

by
DATO' (DR.) ANWAR FAZAL

CONSUMERS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM – BACK TO BASICS

by

DATO' (DR.) ANWAR FAZAL

Senior Regional Advisor of

The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI), UNDP



Brothers and sisters, firstly let me say Assalamualaikum, may peace be upon you. I start with the word ‘salam’, peace, because more than any other word, it represents the essence of our work, of our agenda for human security, of our mission. This “peace” has three dimensions:

1. Peace with ourselves
2. Peace with mother earth and the profound and infinite space we call the universe
3. Peace with all living things, people and others.

Today, unfortunately, we live in a world where “peace” is severely shattered, decimated by the evil forces of violence, of waste and of manipulation. We have a global politics dominated by insincerity and double standards. We have a global environment that is under severe critical stress. We have a global economy that is driven by an ideology of greed and selfishness. In many areas, we see the mother of all failures - “bad governance”. The magazine called “the Economist” once said, “Of all the ills that kill the poor, none is as central as bad governance.”

Champions

Fortunately, there is a worldwide and a magnificent proliferation of citizen movements that are seeking the common good, that are making a difference, that are making waves and making miracles. These movements are increasingly motivated by and driven by a common fire:

- ecological sustainability
- economic productivity
- popular participation
- social justice
- cultural vibrancy

They are fighting what David Korten has called the “over consumer”, and seeking affirmative action for the “marginals” and supporting the “sustainers” who believe in living lightly and responsibly, who are “micro-sensible” and “macro-responsible”, who are engaged in “voluntary simplicity” and even “conspicuous frugality”. The consumer movement must remember its roots - it is about rights and it is about duties but most of all it is about values. For too many people, it is only about “value for money”. It must be just as much, if not more, about “value for people” and “value for the environment”.

Five Natural Laws

My wife, Mahmuda, who is an historian, has shared with me many insights about the past and from those insights, I have developed five “natural laws” about bad civilisations:

- every civilisation that does not make peace with the environment has no future
- every civilisation that does not ensure equity and social justice will suffer its own cruelty
- every civilisation that does not ensure good governance through the full participation of the people will be silenced by its own brutal dictatorship
- every civilisation that does not celebrate its diversity, its cultural and spiritual traditions, will end up with a soulless and purposeless sterility
- every civilisation that does not nurture the concepts of family and community and does not respect and support the special role of women and the needs of the child will be devoured by its own lack of caring and social irresponsibility

Twelve Basic Ideas

Let me share with you what I think are the 12 fundamental ideas for the consumer movement. These will form the framework for any “back to basics” consumer movement.

1. ‘We are all consumers’. This powerful expression of our Universality is the basis of both our strength and solidarity. Basic needs are fundamentally common.
2. ‘Consuming is more than eating’. We consume not just with our mouths but with all our senses. There are 8 ‘Kinds of Consumption’:
 - a. goods-services
 - b. private-public
 - c. direct-indirect
 - d. voluntary-involuntary
 - e. free-pay
 - f. visible-invisible
 - g. immediate-future
 - h. necessary-unnecessary (needs and wants)
3. ‘Not consuming can be as important or even more important than consuming’. Through restraint or boycott, we can determine economic systems. Voluntary simple living is an important movement for the responsible use of the earth’s resources.
4. ‘We have important rights and responsibilities and together they give us both a vision and a conscience’. We must both promote and protect these rights and responsibilities.
5. The rights (eight) are:
 - a. Access to basic goods and services for survival
 - b. Fair prices and choice
 - c. Safety
 - d. Information
 - e. Representation
 - f. Redress

- g. Consumer education
- h. Healthy environment

The first and last rights concerning 'basic needs' and the environment were articulated and contributed by the Third World, in fact from here in Malaysia.

6. The five responsibilities are:
 - a. critical awareness
 - b. action
 - c. social responsibility
 - d. ecological responsibility
 - e. solidarity

7. 'We must confront the anti-consumer'. The 'anti-consumer' manifests itself in the form of:
 - a. Three terrible cultures - violent, manipulative and wasteful industries and business enterprises;
 - b. Three terrible tyrants - ignorant, inefficient and indifferent (or even hostile) bureaucracies.
In the Third World, these cultures and tyrants can be cruel - we have sometimes to fight for our survival and sometimes we have to seek to survive so that we may fight.

8. 'Our solidarity and strength will be enhanced enormously if we 'link and multiply'. We must link seven things:
 - a. the inner and outer environment
 - b. 'hands' and 'heads'
 - c. issues and processes
 - d. 'now' and 'then'
 - e. symptoms and structure
 - f. 'sky' and 'grassroots'
 - g. 'North' and 'South'

We must multiply four things:

- a. information - be skilled in using every variety of media;
- b. people/leaders - true leadership is about creating more leaders, not just more followers;

- c. organizations - create institutions that meet local and specialized needs;
- d. networks - use the 'strength of weak links' to work together on issues. 'Hitchhiking' and 'helicopter vision' are very helpful.

9. 'There are many models for consumer organizations but to best serve the consumers we must always have groups that are of the consumers, by the consumers and for the consumers. Some elements in looking at models include:

Constituency	Issues
i. service orientation	test
ii. advocacy	and/or
iii. empowerment	protest

Structure	Issues
i. private	independence
ti government	and/or
iii. parastatal	income

10. 'We are not anti-business or anti-government. We are for good business and good government. We are only against bad business practices and bad government practices.'
11. 'Because the world is moving towards a 'global village', the consumer movement must also be able to give a countervailing response and develop partnerships for global action.'
12. 'We are a force for happiness and let that positive force permeate our work, our organizations and our lives.'

The Seven Challenges

What are some of the grand challenges to the consumer movement that we have to confront now as we head, often out of control, into the new millennium? I would like to suggest seven of them and speak about them briefly. Like the word, 'Consumer' and 'Challenges', they will begin with the letter 'C':

1. **CASINO CAPITALISM** - Trillions of currency units now move recklessly across borders with devastating consequences to economics and the social fabric.
2. **CRIMINALITY** and **CORRUPTION** - The Gross Criminal Product (GCP) is among the fastest rising index in the world. Consumers pay the price for this.
3. **COMMUNICATION** and **CYBERSPACE** -These are changing relationships of power and perceptions and creating new 'haves' and 'have-nots', and the great digital divide between the 'knows' and the 'knows-not'.
4. **CLONING** - The terrible consequences of genetic engineering and its many uncharted issues resulting in 'Frankenstein' and 'Terminator' technologies which are running wild with their 'agents' of propaganda are descending on us like vultures from a sick planet.
5. **CONSERVATION** - The environment challenge will need to be high on our priorities: the 'endocrine disrupters' remind us of our sins. The 'conspicuous frugality' movement is gaining strength everywhere and you must link with it. 'Water' and 'Waste' are going to be matters of life and death. Look at the diseases -BSE (mad cow), foot and mouth disease - arising as a result of unsustainable farming practices. Organic farming is on the rise - thank god!
6. **COMMERCIALISM** of everything - Important basic needs like health get commercialized beyond reason and ethics. Insidious sponsorships and advertisement placements are added so you don't know what paid advertisements are anymore, eg. in movies (cigarette ads). "Corporatisation", "Privatisation" and the World Trade Organization (WTO) need to be challenged more effectively.
7. Lastly, the insidious **COLONISATION** of mind and stomach - when through sheer technology, marketing and brute intrusion, the mind and stomach are ripped out of their natural integrity and balance. The targeting of children and capturing of their 'minds' by businesses central to this

serious and negative phenomenon can degenerate kids into “Cyclops” - i.e. seeing only in one dimension.

I hope you will roam the 7 “C’s” and they will find some place in your work to protect consumers everywhere. It is often fundamental structural issues that are the root. As we learnt in fighting the infant formula industry, it is not enough to save children who are drowning. We have to look upstream and at those who are throwing them into the water! We have to change the basic structures and go to the roots in order to ensure that we are never enveloped by either state tyranny or market tyranny and, god forbid, a combination of both.

The Pancasila of Power

What can we do? Let me share with you what I call the “Pancasila of Power”. Pancasila means ‘The Five Principles’:

1. The power of **“ONE”** - never underestimate the power of a single individual. Through their example and action. Individuals have transformed the world as history shows.
2. The power of **“MANY”** - networking alliances and partnerships can build your strength - Social movements must link and build on the core values we share.
3. The power of **“FAITH”** - belief and drawing from spiritual traditions can provide powerful universal and inner as well as external strength.
4. The power of **“INFORMATION”** - access to research, education programmes and working with the media can provide the outreach we need for transformational change. Links with the United Nations, its resource, information networks and global agreements need to be better developed.
5. The power of **“SUCCESS”** - every victory, however small, should be shared and celebrated. That glow inspires and grows.

Malaysia has a lively consumer movement. We have provided world-class leadership for the movement. Malaysia is among the few countries in the Third World that has a dedicated Ministry for Consumer Affairs. We are also beginning to have a lively media interest. But we must do more.

Ideas for Action

If five things can happen, and happen quickly, we will serve our citizens better:

1. A Centre for Consumer Studies that can contribute systematically to the intellectual and utilitarian aspects of the consumer movement.
2. An annual “State of the Consumer Report” which is debated annually around World Consumer Rights Day.
3. A guaranteed income for the Institute of Consumer Studies, the Annual State of the Consumer Report, for the Consumer groups through a tax on advertising. This will not only reduce it, hopefully, but would also enable you to fight the bad part of it.
4. Systematic training of consumer professionals.
5. Every newspaper carrying a consumer complaint page.

Conclusion

Lastly, I want to share with you a poem that I contributed to a book entitled “Prayers for a Thousand Years”, a poem to remind us that without peace and harmony, we will self-destruct. The poem is called, “*Remember, We Are One*”.

*“We all drink from one water
We all breathe from one air
We rise from one ocean
And we live under one sky*

*Remember
We are one*

*The newborn baby cries the same
The laughter of children is universal
Everyone’s blood is red
And our hearts beat the same song*

*Remember
We are one*

*We are all brothers and sisters
Only one family, only one earth
Together we live
And together we die*

*Remember
We are one*

*Remember
We are one*

*Peace be on you
Brothers and sisters
Peace be on you ”*

Thank you for inviting me to join you this evening and I look forward to working with all of you for a better future for all Malaysia, and a better world for all of us to live in.

March 15, 2001, World Consumer Rights Day.

Speaker's Profile:

Dato' (Dr) Anwar Fazal is the founder and one of the prime movers of national and global citizen movements including the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Pesticide Action Network (PAN), Health Action International (HAI), and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA). Dato' Anwar was also President of International Organization of Consumer Unions (IOCU) based in Netherlands; Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI) based in Kenya; and Wetlands International Asia Pacific based in Malaysia.

He has initiated several global mobilisation initiatives including World Consumer Day (March 15), World Wetlands Day (February 1), World Breast Feeding Week (August 1-7), and World Migrants Day (December 18).

Trained at the University of Malaya in Economics and Education, Dato' Anwar holds Honorary Doctorates in Law and Philosophy from the National University of Malaysia and University of Science, Malaysia respectively. Dato' Anwar is also a recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, popularly called the "Alternative Nobel Prize" and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) "Global 500" honour.

He is currently the Senior Regional Advisor of The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI), a new project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), promoting good governance principles, and also Director of the Socio-economic and Environmental Research Institute (SERI), a new think tank in Malaysia.

*For further information, please contact
anwar.fazal@undp.org or
secr@waba.po.my*

ISBN 983-40315-2-1



9 789834 031527