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PRESS RELEASE

Consumer Council of Fiji Issues Warning Against Unethical Credit Provider in Central Division

The Consumer Council of Fiji is issuing a stern warning to consumers regarding a credit provider in the Central Division that has raised serious concerns. The Council has so far received a staggering 134 complaints against this particular credit provider, with a combined monetary value of approximately \$150,000. With the onset of festive season, many consumers often take personal loans hence, must take heed of this warning to avoid unfair terms and conditions.

The nature of these complaints paints a troubling picture of unethical business practices, ranging from forcing consumers to purchase items on hire purchase when taking loans, to questionable deductions and misleading loan agreements. Some of the highlighted cases include the service provider placing conditions on cashing loan cheques, ongoing deductions despite account clearance, discrepancies in the release of securities, and failure to fulfill promised items within loan packages.

Consumer Council of Fiji CEO, Ms Seema Shandil has expressed her deep concern over these alarming complaints. "It is disheartening to witness consumers falling victim to this unscrupulous credit provider. The Council is committed to safeguarding the rights and interests of consumers, and we will not tolerate such unethical practices. We are going to consistently push for enforcement actions against this credit provider to ensure they are held accountable for their unethical and illegal actions."

In one disturbing case, the Council received a complaint from an individual who took a \$1,000 loan, promptly repaid the full amount of \$1,450 within two weeks, only to discover persistent interest charges for the subsequent six months. The complainant is rightfully perplexed by this unjust imposition of interest despite fulfilling the repayment obligations. Additionally, the individual raised concerns about the absence of a loan contract copy, questioning the transparency and legality of the loan terms. To exacerbate the situation, when the consumer sought to rectify the deduction issue with the credit provider, they were directed to pay an additional \$10 to process the refund.

"In another case, a consumer sought a loan of \$500 from the credit provider in question, only to discover discrepancies when cross-referencing with her payroll, indicating a loan balance of \$3000. Upon inquiry, the credit provider explained that a coffee table had been added to the loan, although the item was never received by the complainant. Additionally, the company



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claimed to have restructured the loan without providing any documentation to the complainant," adds Ms Shandil.

Ms. Shandil emphasizes the importance of carefully reading the terms and conditions, as well as scrutinizing all relevant details before entering into any financial agreement. "Consumers must be empowered with knowledge to make informed decisions and protect themselves from unscrupulous practices," she added.

The Council is gravely concerned that more consumers may be affected by the dealings of this company but are reluctant to come forward with their complaints. As such, consumers who have faced similar experiences are encouraged to lodge formal complaints with the Council or call the toll-free National Consumer Helpline on 155.

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Ms Seema Shandil

Chief Executive Officer