As e-commerce grows in scope and volume, so does the potential for the incidence of disputes relating to online transactions. Because many such transactions will take place across national frontiers, traditional dispute settlement mechanisms are unlikely be effective in settling disagreements. New ways of settling disputes to be examined include online dispute resolution mechanisms.

The challenges and possible solutions to the problem of disputes over online transactions are the subject of an international conference entitled “Building Trust in the Online Environment: Business to Consumer Dispute Resolution,” jointly organised by the OECD and other partners in The Hague on 11-12 December 2000. Hosted by the Dutch Government and co-sponsored by the International Chamber of Commerce and The Hague Conference on Private International Law, the conference will consider how online alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can help to settle privacy and consumer disputes in e-commerce. It will bring together 250 international experts from governments, business, consumer groups and academia, and it will be open to the media.

Most experts agree that traditional dispute settlement methods, such as law courts, may not provide effective redress for e-commerce-related disputes due to the expense and time involved. Online alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, by contrast, hold the promise of providing fast, affordable redress for a large number of the small claims and low-value transactions arising in B2C e-commerce. In addition, new and developing online technologies may provide innovative and potentially more effective dispute resolution.

The conference will build on efforts by the OECD, its partners and other bodies to promote trust in the online environment. In 1998, the OECD Ministerial Declaration on Protection of Privacy on Global Networks stated the importance of ensuring that “effective enforcement mechanisms are available...to ensure access to redress.” In 1999, the OECD Guidelines on Consumer Protection in the Context of Electronic Commerce urged the need to provide consumers with “meaningful access to fair and timely alternative dispute resolution and redress without undue cost or burden.” The need for appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms in disputes over privacy was highlighted in an OECD Report on the Transborder Data Flow released in September 2000.

For further information, and to register to attend the conference, journalists are invited to contact Meggan Dissly in the OECD’s Media Relations Division (tel. 33 1 45 24 80 94 or meggan.dissly@oecd.org).