

The National Council of Churches, Singapore A Statement on Casino

Introduction

The Singapore Government has announced that it is exploring the feasibility of developing an "integrated entertainment resort, which may also include a casino."¹ The National Council of Churches of Singapore, as a responsible Christian community which is also interested in the socio-economic and moral well-being of the wider society, would like to express our concern regarding the possible inclusion of a casino in the proposed entertainment complex.

We want to begin by affirming that it is desirable to hold fast to the good values and virtues which our society has nurtured and taught through the efforts of the various faith communities, associations, clans, and educational institutions, often with the support of our government's policies. Our concern is that these hard-earned values and virtues like thrift, industry, generosity, and fairness, should not be unravelled by projects or policies which could subvert them and thus impoverish our society instead of enhancing it.

Our Stand

We speak against the building of a casino in Singapore for these reasons:

1. Casinos undermine virtues.

a. They tend to compromise the moral values and virtues required by a society to flourish as a nation marked by excellence in human achievements and good character.

b. Gamblers are inclined to put their trust in luck and chance, often motivated by greed and the mistaken belief that money can be easily obtained without hard-work and social responsibility.

c. Apart from jeopardizing hard-work and social responsibility, a gambling culture, accentuated by the presence of a casino would signal that time-tested virtues shared by people of different faiths, such as honesty, compassion, prudence, integrity, neighbourly love, trustworthiness, and social justice, are no longer of primary concern to Singapore.

2. Casinos will introduce more social ills.

a. Casinos may generate high financial yields. Those who will benefit most from such profits will be the casino operators, their shareholders and the government that collects tax. However, revenue from casino collected by the government will be outweighed by the economic and social costs incurred in combatting crimes and the attendant social ills associated with, and attracted by, a gambling culture.

b. The downside of looking only for high yields, with little regard for social ills, is that such riches will be financed not only by gamblers who might be able to afford their losses but worse still by people who cannot, but are nevertheless tragically trapped in their gambling habits.

c. Losers will not advertise their losses. Invariably they will suffer in silence. That is not the only tragedy. The rippling effect of losses will mean that the losers' families will have to bear the brunt of their foolish indulgence in gambling. In some well-publicized cases, the loser may conspire to cheat and defraud others to feed his gambling addictions.² The end result, sadly, is that the social fabric that sustains a prosperous and peaceful society will be further frayed.

3. It is not in our national interest to have a casino

a. In the interest of Singapore's long-term future, if a casino is built, what are we saying about the kind of a society we want Singapore to become and to excel in? A country which may pride itself on having the best entertainment resort with gambling facilities is unlikely to be a wholesome family-friendly society, which our government seeks to advance. It is unlikely that a country known for its

gambling culture and access to casino facilities will be a desirable place for any responsible family, nourished by time-tested virtues, to settle in, take root and flourish. This would negate the effort to attract and retain talents and even ordinary people of good character, so vital to the continued well-being and prosperity of Singapore.

b. It has been said that certain controls can be introduced to ensure that not every Singaporean will be permitted to enter the casino, if one is built. But that option is weak. Besides the social fallout and the negative impact created by a new "qualifying and non-qualifying" class of local gamblers, Singapore's hard-earned international reputation as a safe, just and corruption-free country that cares for poor and vulnerable people, will be tarnished when Singapore takes on a new tag as a country now targetting and preying on the wallets of gambling tourists, not all of whom are rich.

c. Furthermore, a great country should be one that will protect the interests of not just its citizens. What makes a country great and commendable is its willingness to provide similar protection to overseas visitors. There is nothing commendable about making money from gullible local gamblers or tourists who spend their money in casinos even if they choose to gamble on their own free will.

d. Singapore is not so poor and desperate that we have to depend on revenues derived from casinos and gambling to increase our GDP and to finance social projects. Even if we are poor, we should be a people of dignity and moral courage. There are other ethically sound and responsible ways of generating incomes, attracting businesses and drawing tourists which the government can tap on and promote without compromising our moral standards.

Our Commitment

The National Council of Churches, with members from different social backgrounds, as responsible people who are interested in the well-being of our society - especially those who are vulnerable - will continue to contribute to the building of a compassionate, just, prosperous, peaceful and flourishing Singapore. And we can do this, with God's help and with the cooperative efforts of other concerned and ethically responsible Singaporeans of different faiths, without relying on casinos to generate income or subsidize social projects.

Adopted by the Ex Co of the NCCS at their meeting on 2nd July, 2004.

¹ Ms Lim Chuen Ni, "Casino resort study still at early stage," in the Straits Times' Forum Page (June 18, 2004). Ms Lim is the Senior Assistant Director with the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

² The best recent example is the case involving a senior executive of APB in a multi-million-dollars fraud.