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MEDIA RELEASE

Media Release from the Inaugural Singapore Problem Gambling Conference 5-6 July 2007 Understanding and Addressing Problem Gambling

INTRODUCTION

The National Council on Problem Gambling organised and hosted the Inaugural Singapore Problem Gambling Conference on 5-6 July 2007 in Singapore, with a view to develop a better understanding of problem gambling in the Singapore context, and discuss more effective ways to address the issues faced by problem gamblers and their families. The first of its kind to be held in Singapore, the Conference had an overall theme on “Understanding and Addressing Problem Gambling”, and featured four plenary sessions and three interactive workshop sessions with panels of internationally experts and local practitioners. The Conference attracted the attendance of over 500 participants from government, research, academia, social service, education and healthcare sectors.

The Conference was officially opened by Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, and Second Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts. The full text of Dr. Balakrishnan’s opening address is available at: <http://www.mcys.gov.sg>.

Dr. Rachel Volberg, President of Gemini Research and ex-officio member of the United States National Council on Problem Gambling Executive Committee gave a keynote speech touching on trends, policy conundrums and strategies. Emerging trends include the continuing spread of popular forms of commercial gambling, increasing challenges and opportunities posed by new technologies, and increasing recognition that problem gambling is a critical public policy dimension affecting commercial gambling. Dr Volberg stressed the need for planning and coordination among key stakeholders, and the importance of developing evidence-based services, and evaluation and research.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The Conference plenary sessions discussed and shared experiences on policy measures, people-sector initiatives, helping problem gamblers and their families, and social responsibility initiatives by gambling operators. The workshop

sessions covered policy research on public education and prevention; clinical treatment, and prevention strategies on youth problem gambling.

Plenary Sessions

With regard to policy measures, panel discussions highlighted the value of having high-level national councils to coordinate multi-sectoral initiatives. The approaches shared by the three country experiences (Australia, New Zealand and Singapore) indicate partnerships among all stakeholders in addressing the issue. There was general agreement that more research and data collection is necessary, to formulate appropriate and relevant policies.

On people-sector initiatives to address problem gambling, strategic priorities were mostly set and led by the national councils on problem gambling. Experiences were shared by the United States National Council on Problem Gambling, Singapore National Council on Problem Gambling, and the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand. Initiatives include service provision (helplines, counselling), public education, and surveys on public attitudes towards gambling.

On experiences in helping problem gamblers and their families, Care Corner Counselling Centre and Thye Hwa Kwan Moral Society shared their respective experiences in setting up pilot initiatives to address problem gambling at community-level. Discussions highlighted the professionalisation of service, and that all involved in dealing with the issue of problem gambling need to work collaboratively to understand the approaches of each other's work. Multidisciplinary and integrated approaches are necessary to ensure quality service delivery. Experiences and research indicate the importance of family support in the recovery of problem gamblers.

With regard to social responsibility initiatives in the industry, representatives of Las Vegas Sands and Singapore Totalisator Board shared their respective missions on responsible gambling, and current practices that undertake to be sensitive to the interest of the community.

Workshop sessions

Workshop sessions on policy research discussed multi-disciplinary efforts in prevention and public education, and in development of treatment approaches and screening tools. Workshop sessions on prevention strategies for youth gambling covered worldwide trends in youth problem gambling, research based prevention strategies and programmes for youth, and identification and treatment strategies for youth with gambling problems. Workshop sessions on clinical treatment focused on increasing motivation of problem gamblers and their families to change current behaviours and overcome emotional and other distresses related to gambling.

Key areas of interest for the participants included youth as an at-risk group, best practices on treatment, challenges in conducting prevalence surveys of problem gambling, application of various problem gambling screens for surveys on problem gambling, best practices in research, and how exclusion measures are implemented in various jurisdictions.

NCPG'S FOLLOW-UP

NCPG will be studying some of the issues and take into consideration the knowledge gained from the Conference in formulating the Council's future strategies and initiatives. NCPG Chairman Mr. Lim Hock San said, "I am very encouraged by the strong interest shown by all stakeholders involved in the Conference. The Conference was a good platform for sharing of knowledge and expertise, and in building Singapore's domain knowledge in problem gambling. We will certainly consider holding Conferences in this area in the future."

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About the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG):

The NCPG was appointed in August 2005 as part of Singapore's national framework to address problem gambling. It is a council comprising 15 members with expertise and experience in public communications, psychiatry and psychology, social work, counselling and rehabilitative services. The Council's main roles are to provide advice and feedback to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on public education programmes to promote public awareness on problem gambling; to decide on funding applications for preventive and rehabilitative programmes; to assess and advise the Government on the effectiveness of treatment, counselling and rehabilitative programmes; and to decide on the applications for exclusion of persons from casinos. For more information, please see www.ncpg.org.sg.

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Attachments:

Annex A: English-Chinese Glossary

ANNEX C: ENGLISH-CHINESE GLOSSARY

National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)	全国预防嗜赌理事会
Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS)	社会发展, 青年及体育部
Problem Gambling	嗜赌
Gamblers	赌徒
Pathological/ Problem Gambler (PPG)	病态赌徒
Gambling Addiction	赌瘾
Addiction	癖瘾症
Mr Lim Hock San, Chairman	林福山先生, 主席