



EMBARGOED TILL 23 October 2012, 9.00AM

WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR LIM HOCK SAN, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING, AT THE SINGAPORE PROBLEM GAMBLING CONFERENCE 2012, ON TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2012 AT 9.00AM, AT ORCHARD HOTEL GRAND BALLROOM

Mr Chan Chun Sing, The Honourable Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

1. Good morning and a very warm welcome to all of you. This is the third conference of the National Council on Problem Gambling, or NCPG for short.

2. This year's event is the first problem gambling conference held after the opening of the casinos in 2010. The two earlier conferences focused on garnering public awareness of problem gambling and nurturing responsible gambling practices by operators. In short, strengthening gamblers' resolve to cope with the changing gambling landscape in Singapore.

Achievements Thematic

3. Since its inception in 2005, the Council considered it of paramount importance to lay the foundations and the framework in the areas of public education and support services for problem gamblers.

4. In 2007, we rolled the first public awareness campaign, to encourage chronic gamblers to seek help, and practice self-restraint on gambling. This campaign had extraordinary impact and continues to be remembered today as the “Piggy Bank girl”, who was visually fearful of entrusting her life savings to her chronic gambler father.

5. In 2009, NCPG implemented a self-exclusion scheme, in which gamblers or their families could voluntarily exclude the gambler from the casinos. Supported by the National Addictions Management Service of the Institute of Mental Health, and the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society, we initiated a designated helpline service to facilitate for such exclusion.

6. The theme for the public campaign then was to “Know The Line” - a no-go zone of pre-set limits so that gamblers do not wittingly or unwittingly cross the divide of harmless gambling, and into losing all sense of control.

7. Today, the “Helpline” service is available 24/7 for gamblers to seek counselling and help, and also to apply for casino self-exclusion. Despite the natural inclination for undue optimism in all games of chance, we are gratified that more people have begun to come forward to seek help.

Stakeholder Engagement

8. The NCPG continues to engage in feedback and exchanging ideas with community groups, and serves as a conduit to the Government on strengthening social safeguards and

safety markers on gambling. Many of these feedbacks, such as the streamlining of exclusion application processes, have been adopted by Government.

9. The community groups and the stakeholders should be commended for their public spiritedness in contributing views and recommendations in this regard.

Public Education and Help Services to Target Families

10. Over the two years, we have stepped up efforts to improve public education and support services. It has been a commonly held perception that the gambler is the only person who needs help. We know that the family of the problem gambler needs as much assistance – both to encourage and provide a non-judgmental environment for problem gamblers to seek help, and to mitigate the adverse effects on the family from the gambler’s behaviour.

11. The close family unit, the gambler’s inner circle of friends, and his extended network of friends and colleagues provides a web of obligations and moderation for the gambler. Hence, this year’s problem gambling campaign, “Seek Help and Turn Your Luck Around”, is targeted at encouraging families to obtain proactive help, with the gambler’s assent, or without or even despite non-cooperation of the gambler.

Community Outreach

12. We have also stepped up community outreach initiatives, and mutual self-help within the community. We recently concluded our annual *Getai* outreach to the HDB heartlands, where we publicised responsible gambling and help-seeking messages to some 85,000 heartlanders at 30 *Getai* shows.

13. Our seniors programme by YAH! College has also grown from strength to strength over the years. We now have a good pool of trained senior gambling ambassadors who are actively spreading the gambling awareness message through talks, skits and road shows at various community events involving seniors.

14. The youth of today is a wired generation and they represent our future. Hence NCPG, through MCYC Community Services, also runs a series of Gambling Prevention Road shows using toolkits for the young.

Building Capability

15. Gambling is a multi-faceted problem – of emotions tied to personal responsibility, financial difficulties, and marital conflicts about money and so on. Therefore, the help professionals dealing with this matter must be equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience.

16. Towards this end, NCPG has engaged the National Addictions Management Service to conduct a Problem Gambling Intervention Training and Certification programme for social service agencies.

On the 2012 Conference

17. This year's conference – "Addressing Harms to Families of Problem Gamblers", brings together proven experts and practitioners who specialise in helping families affected by problem gambling. They will share their empirical research and experiences on areas such as elderly gambling and the impact of gambling on family and well-being. With the focus on prevention and intervention.

18. Our keynote speaker, Dr Alex Blaszczynski, a very familiar name in gambling studies, will use the framework of “Responsible Gambling” to share his insights.

Conclusion

19. I hope that the Conference will inspire, rejuvenate and renew our passion in assisting problem gamblers and their families. This is an unending and arduous journey, but one which is rewarding for the many lives it can change. Thank you very much.

