



جمعية العلماء ومدرسي الدين الإسلامي بسنغافورة

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PERGAS

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RESPONSE FROM PERGAS REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROVAL FOR SINGAPORE POOLS AND SINGAPORE TURF CLUB TO OFFER ONLINE GAMBLING

We refer to local media reports dated 30 September 2016, regarding the move by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in approving the applications by Singapore Pools (Pools) and Singapore Turf Club (STC) for exemption from the Remote Gambling Act (RGA) to offer online gambling. The reports also mentioned that if the two operators are found violating certain conditions, they can be fined up to \$1 million per violation.

2 Pergas understands that this forms one of the efforts taken by the government to control online betting and underground gambling.

3 However, Pergas would like to voice its concern regarding the government's approval of online gambling and its negative effects on the general Singaporean community regardless of their religious background.

The Prohibition of Gambling in Islam

4 As the organisation that is responsible for shaping religious leadership, it is Pergas' duty to provide religious guidance to the Muslim community. Hence, Pergas is of the opinion that there is no compromise in the prohibition of gambling, and that it clearly causes adverse effects to the individual as well as the community.

5 Gambling is strictly prohibited in Islam. This prohibition is clearly stated in Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 90:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ. إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ ۖ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ.

Meaning: “O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful. Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?” (Al-Maidah: 90 – 91)

6 Based on this divine prohibition, Islam forbids gambling and other major sins such as consuming alcohol, making offerings to idols, and fortune-telling. Gambling is also categorised *najasa* or impurity, depicting its vile and despicable act, and Muslims are commanded to abstain from it due to its associated harms. Allah the Almighty also described the negative effects of gambling such as causing enmity and hatred in society, and distraction from the remembrance of God.

The Negative Implications of Online Betting on the Fabric of Community Living

7 Allowing online gambling in order to curb unlicensed operators may lead to more negative effects, for example the erosion of moral values within the community. Studies have revealed the ill-effects of gambling on the society. Allowing online gambling to be offered by the two local operators will make it easier for individuals to gamble wherever they are, including using their mobile phones to place bets.

8 Multiple studies found that online betting is fast becoming a recreational activity. Gambling also causes problems socially, psychologically and financially which will then affect the gambling addict at work and in school, leading to health and family problems.

9 In fact, studies have shown that problems among those who gamble online are more prevalent, compared to those who do not gamble online. Studies revealed that gambling addiction is linked to its ease and accessibility on the internet.¹ The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) survey on Participation in Gambling Activities among Singapore Residents 2014 found that among gamblers with poor self-control, online gamblers formed the largest group compared to gamblers who were involved in other forms of gambling.

10 In addition to that, the survey also found that gamblers of table games in local casinos are the second group with the poorest self-control. It also reported that there is a rise in the number of new gambling addicts seeking help. Hence, Pergas is concerned that the legalisation of online gambling will lead to more problems.

Religious Guidance for The Muslim Community

11 Moving forward, Pergas would like to remind the Muslim community to abstain from being involved in any gambling activities, which are forbidden in Islam. They should also be resilient in preventing themselves from partaking in any form of gambling activities, as it becomes easier with this approval of online gambling. Hopefully through this spirit of advising one another to do good deeds and spreading truth, it will help to remind us to refrain from gambling and other bad influences.

12 There are also several ways to tackle gambling addiction and other related problems such as financial difficulties and debt. Affected individuals may seek assistance from their nearest Family Service Centre (FSC), or the NCPG for support through the national helpline. In such situations, Islam also advises us to enhance one's spirituality through prayers and supplications, which can help in suppressing the worldly desires to gamble.

SINGAPORE ISLAMIC SCHOLARS & RELIGIOUS TEACHERS ASSOCIATION (PERGAS)

¹ Auer, Michael, and Mark Griffiths. "The Use of Personalized Behavioral Feedback for Online Gamblers: An Empirical Study." *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015); Gainsbury, Sally M. "Online Gambling Addiction: The Relationship Between Internet Gambling and Disordered Gambling." *Current Addiction Reports* 2, no. 2 (2015).