

# Gambling Is A Matter Of Concern

## Letters to the Editor



THERE is increasing demand for gambling to be legalised in Namibia. As a private citizen this is a matter of great concern to me. The main arguments in favour of a legalised institution of gambling is that it would generate much-needed revenue to fund government social programmes. Such an argument is pernicious in its ultimate effect and creates a false sense of social responsibility.

It is my considered view that, in a country like Namibia, no useful purpose could be achieved by the institution of state-run or regulated gambling.

There is substantial evidence from other countries to indicate that control by regulation does not prevent exploitation by the criminal element. Instead there develops increasing pressure on law enforce-

ment authorities, with resultant higher costs to the **tax**paying public. If the law cannot be enforced, then there develop poor attitudes towards the law and law enforcement. In addition, I contend that legalised gambling through lotteries will not stop illegal sales of foreign sweepstake tickets or fraudulent lotteries. Conducting the lotteries under government auspices will not avoid this danger either.

Having followed the debate on gambling, there is an illusion that financial returns from lotteries and other forms of gambling will provide a much-needed source for revenue. The fact that

a growing number of the public prefer an illusion like this is no argument for legalisation of lotteries. An unenlightened majority will most probably be wrong, especially when it ignores the experience of history. Furthermore, it can be readily demonstrated that lotteries are an uneconomical way to raise money. A good example can be obtained from Ireland.

The total income from the Irish hospitals from the Irish sweepstakes, counting all money now gathered in Canada, the US, Britain and elsewhere, amounts to about four million dollars a year. This is less than the 19 per cent of the money paid by those who

bought genuine sweepstake tickets, excluding the sums spent on counterfeit tickets.

The legalisation of the institution of gambling weakens the basic premise of the good society, namely the Christian and humanitarian concept of social responsibility for one's neighbour.

Namibia being a predominantly Christian community, I believe it is a Christian duty to take unto one's self the need for one's neighbour instead of taking from him.

The fact is that often those people who engage in gambling are those who are least able to afford the financial cost.

The low-income groups and the deprived portion of our population seem to be most susceptible to gambling.

Thus lotteries may contribute indirectly to the cost of health and social services for certain sections of the population.

I hold the conviction that gambling, even of a minor nature, is contrary to the Christian ethic. The commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet' makes clear the Biblical teaching that men are not to seek their own material advancement at the expense of others.

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*Note: The writer states that the views in this letter do not in any way represent those of his employer, the Council of Churches. This letter has also been shortened.*

**-Ed.**