

**The Fiji Council of Churches and Interfaith Group Consultation with the David Group  
Fiji Casino Project  
17<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
By Archbishop Peter Chong**

The Fiji Council of Churches organized a consultation in casinos in Fiji. There were 64 participants representing 35 groups which included Faith Communities, NGOs, Woman's groups, media, Youth groups.

There two keynote speeches, by the David Proud Group presentation on the Casino project and the other by Archbishop Peter Chong: A Catholic Perspective on Casinos.

This was followed by small group sharing using the '**spiritual conversation method**'. In the small groups the participants prayed, shared the fruits of their prayer, listened to each other and listened to God regarding casinos.

The small groups reported to the large group the fruits of the sharing and listening.

This is a summary of Group Discussion:

- There was a need for research and broader consultation on casinos.
- The David Proud Group argued that the casino will serve as an economic development. What is the best form of economic development that serves the human person and not only the company? The Fiji Government needs to take an in-depth study on economic development and not to be solely dependent on offers made by companies like David Proud.
- Fiji should listen to the experience of Churches and Faith communities overseas who have had experiences of the casino industry. Archbishop Peter Chong's online

research on the Churches' pastoral responses to casino showed that casinos bring a lot of social problems such as: family and marriage breakdown, loss of income and bankruptcy, stress, mental health, suicide, mounting debt, drug trafficking, prostitution, addiction to gambling, and un-attended children.

- The Proud Group stated that only tourists will be allowed into the proposed casino. Locals will be barred from entry. This means that the Proud Group know that the casino is not good for people and thus the reason for barring locals. However, they will give something that is bad to the tourists. Tourists are human beings and children of God and should be treated with dignity. What is the image of Fiji David Proud Group is showing to the world?
- Some groups criticized the Fiji Government and David Proud Group for limiting their consultation to the Methodist Church. The David Proud Group took a Methodist delegation to Macau to observe the casino industry. The participants call for a broader consultation.
- Some group reports were clear in their position on casino, "No to casino."

We need to be more informed by in-depth research on casinos before we make decisions. For example, the research by Michael B. Walker; *Gambling Government: The Economic and Social Impacts* (1998). In this book Walker looks at the evidence on how gambling is reshaping state economies and putting pressure on welfare services in Australia. He highlights the trade-offs which governments are engaged in when they promote gambling as a means of reviving cities and funding services. Finally Walker outlines a program for reforms to the way we deal with the impact of gambling. He adds:

“The reality is that the gambling industry exists because gambling is unfair. The gambling industry has the odds in its favour: there are no even money gambles. There is a mathematical theory that proves that the more a person gambles, the more sure they are to lose. All regular gamblers will lose in the long run no matter what their earlier successes.”

Walker argues that gambling is unfair and unjust. It favours the owner of the casino. It fails to serve the common good.

Overall, there is need for research and broad consultation before we make decisions on establishing casinos in Fiji.

The Fiji Council of Church invited the government officials to the consultation and it was unfortunate that they were not able to attend. We pray that they our decision will always be for peoples' development and interest and not only the company's' interest.