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Strategy for building resilient health systems and post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery to sustain and protect public health gain

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Council of Nurses and the over 27 million nurses worldwide.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the contribution of the nursing workforce to strong and resilient health systems and the risk that nurses are taking to respond to the pandemic. As document CD59/11 notes, as of May 12, 2021, in 22 countries in the Americas, at least 1,827,112 health workers have contracted COVID-19 and at least 9,159 have died. ICN is extremely concerned about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce, including the persistence of high workloads in difficult working conditions, the rising rates of mental distress, and worsening nursing workforce shortages. It is clear that protecting the nursing workforce and supporting the nursing role is crucial to ensuring a resilient and functioning health system.

It is highlighted that the region suffers from chronic underinvestment in human resources for health (HRH) and a lack of information systems to report on HRH distribution, lines of care and professional categories, and composition and characteristics of interprofessional health teams. As such, ICN urges Member States to invest in the health workforce, prioritizing safe working environments and working hours, training and continuous education on infection control, strengthening surveillance system for health worker infections and deaths, rapidly scaling up mental health support and services to health workers and effectively attracting and retaining the nursing workforce.

Integrating the newly released WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (2021-2025) into national health systems planning should be at the core of the transformation of health systems for greater resilience. ICN emphasizes the importance of engaging and empowering nurse leaders and call on the Directing Council to appoint a Chief Nursing Officer for the region. We also call on Member States to establish and strengthen senior leadership positions for the nursing workforce.

*The **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally*