



## 73<sup>rd</sup> WHO WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

Provisional agenda item 3

### **Address by WHO Director-General devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic response in advance of the opening of the Health Assembly**

May 2020

The number of COVID-19 infections and deaths in health workers is a global emergency. It is an immediate and serious threat to the safety of the public and to one of our most precious resources, nurses. ICN is collecting data on these numbers through our member associations and is extremely alarmed by infection rates above 20% in some countries and at the death of at least 360 nurses. As this data is not being systematically collected, there are likely hundreds of thousands more infections and we could see thousands more nurses die. ICN, on behalf of the over 28 million nurses worldwide, repeat the urgent call to Member States to immediately collect standardised data on health worker infection and death rates as this is crucial to improving infection control measures and saving the lives of nurses and patients.

Member States must take necessary actions to ensure that nurses have access to a sufficient quantity of appropriate personal protective equipment which is required to protect their health. Furthermore, actions to prevent and mitigate mental health consequences should be prioritised as this pandemic has put nurses at an even higher risk of psychological distress.

ICN strongly condemns attacks against health workers and calls on governments to take immediate action to prevent this violence. Effective responses must address the root causes, which include fear and misinformation, and through strong but responsible enforcement actions.

Working in close collaboration, ICN recognises WHO's critical role in the COVID-19 pandemic response and calls for international solidarity and collaboration to tackle this together.

The world already faced a shortage of 6 million nurses and that number will continue to rise unless political commitment is made to support and invest in the nursing workforce. The State of the World's Nursing report has provided the evidence and we urge governments to leverage this to invest in nursing education, jobs and leadership.

Your applause is heard loudly but your actions are even louder.