World Mental Health Day: International Council of Nurses renews call to protect nurses' mental health in grip of pandemic

- *Nurses at risk from trauma, violence and fear of infection*
- *Mental health services at risk from shortage of psychiatric/mental health nursing workforce*

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 October 2021 - In advance of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, which is advocating *to make mental health care for all a reality*, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) is urging that nurses are not left out.

"Nurses are suffering," said ICN Chief Executive Officer, Howard Catton. "World Mental Health Day is a stark reminder of the mass traumatisation of nurses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. If we are serious about *making mental health care for all a reality* we must address the horrendous situation our nurses are suffering. Along with the exhaustion, grief and fear faced by nurses who are caring for patients, nurses continue to be the victims of violent attacks. Whether it's abhorrent physical attacks, including chlorine being thrown, hostage taking or other forms of despicable physical attacks, or more subtle forms such as being socially ostracized around childcare or tenancies, our nurses mental health is being undermined and eroded.

'Let's not shy away from the fact that there is a clear link between misinformation around the vaccines and the mental health strain on our nurses. We must renew public health messages on the need to vaccinate and not be set off course by irresponsible and extreme views, undermining our health systems and those who provide them."

In September 2021, a nurse in Quebec, Canada was punched in the face by man who accused her of vaccinating his wife without his permission. Just a few days ago in Guatemala, nurses attempting to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to those who wanted them were attacked and held hostage by villagers. Sadly, these violent attacks against nurses and other healthcare workers are not new. In March 2021, an interactive map showing violence against healthcare workers related to conflict, showed that 412 of 1,172 incidents were directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic and response measure. See more here.

Compounding the situation, unvaccinated nurses in Africa, South America and other regions continue to live in fear for their health and lives due to lack of vaccine equity. In Africa only one health worker in ten is fully vaccinated.

"When nurses show up to work each day in fear of violence or infection, this has a serious impact on their mental health," added Catton. "We hear from nurses around the world about the historic problem of underfunding affecting access to mental health services, which is now being further compounded by the pandemic. Let's not forget that WHO reports that on average almost half of the mental health workforce are nurses, and even more in some regions. If we want to increase access to mental health services we must care for the carers because nurses and the services they provide are indivisible."

Today, the World Health Organization is releasing the *Mental Health Atlas 2020* which provides an overview of mental health resources available around the world. The report shows that globally nurses represent 44% of the mental health workforce, though in some regions, such as the Western Pacific, they represent up to 68% of the workforce.

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Note to Editors

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 care for all and sound health policies globally.

For more information please contact Gyorgy Madarasz, Press Officer at madarasz@icn.ch
Tel: +41 22 908 01 16

www.icn.ch