

**Joint Statement  
to the  
United Nations High-level Meeting on  
Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Control  
19-20 September 2011 - New York, USA**

## **Mental Health and the Scope of Noncommunicable Diseases**

We, the NGO Forum for Health (Geneva) and the NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York) Affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) jointly support the *WHO Action Plan for a Global Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases* (NCDs) and efforts to ensure its implementation at all levels. At the same time, we recall the following:

- In December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly stressed that “**mental health problems are of major importance to all societies and are significant contributors to the burden of disease and the loss of quality of life and have huge economic and social costs**” in a resolution calling for increased attention to health as an important policy issue on the international agenda: *Global health and foreign policy*<sup>1</sup>.
- In the same resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed “the central role of the United Nations system in meeting the challenges of global health in a changing environment and the need to enhance the visibility of health issues in the different United Nations forums”.
- Since its entry into force in 1948, the Constitution of the World Health Organization states that “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

**We therefore urge Member States of the United Nations to include mental health as a fundamental consideration in their approach to NCDs.**

We applaud *The Brazzaville Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases Prevention and Control in the WHO African Region* of 6 April 2011 in this regard, with its explicit inclusion of mental disorders in the NCD agenda.

We also support the *Moscow Declaration of the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Noncommunicable Disease Control* of 28-29 April 2011 which recognizes mental disorders as NCDs that “significantly contribute to the global disease burden”.

**We stress the fact that the inclusion of mental health in the WHO Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases will strengthen, intensify, and hasten its achievement.**

Mental health disorders are noncommunicable diseases with features in common with the selected NCDs - cancers, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory disorders and diabetes - notably chronicity and the need for long-term treatment and care.

Furthermore, we underscore that NCDs and mental disorders together originate in “conditions in which people live”<sup>2</sup> and both are clearly implicated when one is “[m]indful of the strong links between non-communicable diseases and poverty”<sup>3</sup>. We agree with the *WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health* that health strategies must build squarely on the premise that improved conditions of life and the eradication of poverty are fundamental to the improvement of human health and well-being.

These diseases arise together. Persons with diabetes have twice the risk of being depressed as non-diabetic persons. New research shows that depression and life style risks – lack of exercise, obesity and smoking - are together strong determinants of Alzheimer’s disease, as they are of the four selected NCDs. Because of their extraordinary long-term demand on health systems and human resources and the need for their sustainability, the dementias are emerging as the most costly global epidemic yet; action to prevent them must be prioritized.

We urge the Heads of State and Government of the United Nations to acknowledge that to enhance global health and lower the economic burden of disease, especially in resource poor settings, interventions must address the two groups of diseases inseparably. Omission of mental disorders from the global NCD agenda will only aggravate the stigma attached to these disorders.

**We urge the United Nations High-level Meeting to determine the indivisible inclusion of mental disorders in noncommunicable diseases and to commit the United Nations system to action on mental health within the NCD global agenda.**

**[page 1 of 2: Endorsements on page 2]**

<sup>1</sup> UNGA A/65/L.27 <sup>2</sup> WHO/WHA53.17 (PP3) <sup>3</sup> WHO/EB128/Conf. Paper No. 10 Rev.1, 24 Jan. 2011, PP17

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NGO Forum for Health (Geneva) and NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York)  
Endorsements

<p>AARP ADAPT - London, UK Aga Khan Foundation Alcohol and other Drug Council of Australia Alzheimer's Disease International American Psychological Association Armenian Constitutional Right-Protective Centre Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes Association of World Citizens Central Gauteng Mental Health Society, Johannesburg Central Sanitaire Suisse Central Veterinary Laboratory, Tanzania Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations Community Outreach for Development and Welfare Advocacy, United Kingdom Congregations Of Saint Joseph CSO Citizens for a UN People's Assembly Democratic World Federalists Deutsches Institut für Ärztliche Mission Disaster Response and Resilience Research Group, University of Western Sydney, Australia European Association for Counselling Excellent Concept Organization, Accra, Ghana Gauteng Consumer Advocacy Movement, Johannesburg Global Alcohol Policy Alliance Global Welfare Association, Cameroon Gray Panthers Institute for Planetary Synthesis Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London International AIDS Society International Alliance of Women International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions International Association for Counselling International Association of Applied Psychology International Baby Food Action Network International Council of Nurses International Council of Psychologists International Council of Women International Federation for Business &amp; Professional Women International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers International Federation of Social Workers International Federation on Ageing International Health Awareness Network International Medical Corps International Movement For Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples, Belgium International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies International Union Against Cancer</p>	<p>International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences Kosmos Associates, Inc. Life University Member Care Associates Mental Health America Mission Australia MJoTA Institute of Medical Writing Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Program in Global Psychiatry National Council of Women /USA. Nepal Mental Health Foundation New York State Psychological Association Nord-Sud XXI, Switzerland Olof Palme Peace Foundation Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association PCI-Media Impact Peoples' Health Movement - Safe Observer International Premiere Urgence-Aide Medicale Internationale - Thailand Public Services International RESID - Réseau d'Education et de Soutien aux Initiatives de Developpement, Cameroun SHARE (Australia) Inc Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Sorooptimist International South African Federation for Mental Health Ted Noffs Foundation, Australia. The Clifford Beers Foundation The Human Lactation Center The Leprosy Mission International The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem United Methodist Church--General Board of Church/Society University Health Network, Ontario, Canada William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology Women Consortium of Nigeria Women International Zionist Organisation, Tel Aviv Israel Women of Reform Judaism World Alliance of YMCAs World Council for Psychotherapy World Council of Churches World Federation for Mental Health World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations World Mission Foundation World Vision International World YWCA Worldwide Organisation for Women Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work Youth Action Movement, Gambia ZONTA International</p>
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