

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

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

### Endorsements

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 and 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  
 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  
 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  
 Soroptimist 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  
 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

[page 2 of 2: Statement on page 1]

<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