

ICN demands G20 nations take action to stop nurses and other healthcare workers dying in the pandemic, after WHO confirms up to 180,000 have died already

Geneva, Switzerland, 29 October 2021 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is calling on the G20 group of nations, which is meeting in Rome on 30-31 October, to finally take strong action to protect vital nursing and healthcare staff from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO), whose work on these figures has been supported by ICN's own analysis, recently confirmed that up to 180,000 healthcare workers have died from COVID-19, a death toll which ICN believes is a conservative estimate. With nurses still having to work unvaccinated and without proper personal protective equipment (PPE) in many parts of the world, ICN is calling for coordinated action to stop this, otherwise more healthcare staff will die, and the pandemic will drag on and on.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said: "I believe WHO's estimate of up to 180,000 deaths is a conservative one, and I think the true figure could be closer to a quarter of a million. It is a terrible indictment of governments' failures to act to protect these nurses and other healthcare workers who were just going to work to do their jobs.

'But another important and worrying issue here is that the total number of deaths that countries have bothered to report to the WHO is less than 7,000. That suggests that these tragic deaths are not being taken seriously. What would happen to a different industry if it killed a quarter of a million of its staff within 18 months, as a direct result of them going to work without proper protection? It would be closed down. But of course, you can't close down health services, because they are far too important to our health, and to our social and economic wellbeing.

'One death is a tragedy: it leaves in its wake a family without a mum or dad, kids being orphaned. But when you are talking about thousands of deaths, it's just treated as a statistic. And every nurse who dies leaves a gap in an already overstretched and undersized workforce: we are going to need about 12 million more nurses by 2030 just to stand still.

'Governments have turned a blind eye to this tragedy and it's unforgivable. The very people who save us in our hour of need have, in many parts of the world, been and continue to be exposed to a deadly disease without PPE and without prioritised access to vaccines. And we must not forget that the pandemic has caused a mass traumatisation of the healthcare workforce, the ramifications of which will last for years. People are leaving the professions because they cannot stay while they are unsupported and vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. We are now on the brink of a global nurse and healthcare worker crisis that will have tragic consequences everywhere. Hospitals without nurses are just warehouses for the sick, and community services without nurses offer no services at all.

‘The world’s nurses will be meeting at ICN’s virtual Congress on November 2-4, and they will have been closely watching events at the G20 over the weekend. The G20 governments are in a prime position to take the lead and show some compassion for the nurses and other healthcare workers who have done more than anybody else to see the world through the pandemic. ICN is backing Gordon Brown’s call for the 240,000,000 ‘spare’ vaccines that are hanging around unused in richer nations to be airlifted to the countries that need them most. No more talk – let’s see action from the G20 now: it is the least they can do.’

* * *

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