



Republic of Ecuador
Permanent Mission to the
United Nations

June 15, 2020

His Excellency Tijjani Muhammad-Bande
President of the 74th session of the United National General Assembly

His Excellency Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Excellencies,

**Joint Statement of Support to the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 and the Need for
Action on Mental Health**

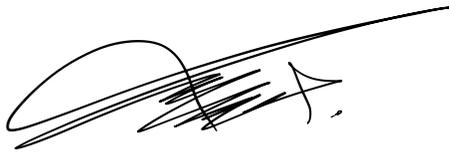
As co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Mental Health and Wellbeing, we have the honor to transmit the attached Joint Statement in support of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the Need for Action on Mental Health on behalf of 90 signatories.

The statement welcomes the Secretary-General's appeal to put mental health front and center of our responses to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It also supports efforts to send a strong and clear message on the importance of the issue to the international community and to set guidelines on how countries should promote and address mental health issues as part of the COVID-19 response. It is our hope that this widely supported statement will encourage the UN, member states and all actors concerned to address the mental health dimension of this pandemic.

As the Secretary-General has stated, although the COVID-19 crisis is, in the first instance, a physical health crisis, it has the seeds of a major mental health crisis as well, if action is not taken. It is therefore crucial that we all act together. It is our hope that the Joint Statement and other efforts in the field of mental health will help bring positive widespread change when addressing this multi-dimensional health issue.

We would kindly request that the enclosed statement, together with the complete list of sponsors be issued as a document of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 123: Strengthening of the United Nations system.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.



Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain
Ambassador Jamal Fares Alrowaiei



Permanent Representative of Canada
Ambassador Marc-André Blanchard



Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Belgium
Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve



Permanent Representative of Ecuador
Ambassador Luis Gallegos Chiriboga

Copy To:

- All Permanent Representatives to the United Nations
- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, WHO

**Statement of Support to the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 and the
Need for Action on Mental Health**

1. In the face of the unprecedented spread of COVID-19, we, a cross-regional group of countries, strongly support the appeal by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for countries to put mental health front and center of their responses to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we welcome the release of the Policy Brief entitled 'COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health' which sends a strong and clear message on the importance of the issue to the international community and sets guidelines on how countries should promote and address mental health issues as part of the COVID-19 response.
2. We express our deep concern regarding the impact the pandemic has had on mental health and wellbeing of whole societies. The situation has been exacerbated by the consequences of the precautionary measures taken almost globally, by worry related to death and the spread of the disease, physical isolation, poverty and economic anxiety produced by the pandemic. This situation is further exacerbated by a historic underinvestment in mental health promotion, prevention and care before the pandemic.
3. We recognize that mental health issues do not affect just one specific group in society, but impacts different groups notably children, young people, women and people in humanitarian and conflict settings, older adults and people with pre-existing health conditions, first responders and frontline healthcare workers.
4. We support the recommended actions underlined by the Secretary-General and stress that tackling mental health should be an essential component of national responses to COVID-19. The opportunity should be seized to include mental health policies into the general health narrative which can once and for all end the stigma surrounding the issue of mental health.

5. At this decisive juncture, now more than ever the global community must remain focused on accelerating the implementation of SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, including its associated target that provides for reducing by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and to promote mental health and well-being by 2030. To that end, our efforts must be redirected to the immediate challenge of strengthening our collective action to combat the pandemic using effective strategies.
6. We commend the UN for scaling up its mental health and psychosocial response to support people to cope with COVID-19 and we express our appreciation to the World Health Organization for its leading role in coordinating pandemic preparedness and response. We encourage it to also take the lead in developing a strategy to ensure that Governments have the support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health. We call upon all UN agencies to ensure that they include mental health in their COVID-19 responses.
7. The COVID-19 pandemic already has and will continue to have profound mental health consequences. Addressing this issue is therefore critical for our success. We therefore commit to come together urgently to address the mental health dimension of this pandemic.

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