



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fourth session

Agenda item 123

### Strengthening of the United Nations system

#### **Letter dated 15 June 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Bahrain, Belgium, Canada and Ecuador to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

As Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of Mental Health and Well-being, we have the honour 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 (see annex).

The statement welcomes the Secretary-General's appeal to put mental health front and centre of our responses to and recovery from the coronavirus disease (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 United Nations, 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 multidimensional health issue.

We would kindly request that the enclosed statement, together with the complete list of sponsors, be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 123.

*(Signed)* Jamal Fares **Alrowaiei**

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain

*(Signed)* Marc **Pecsteen de Buytsverve**

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Belgium

*(Signed)* Marc-André **Blanchard**

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Canada

*(Signed)* Luis **Gallegos Chiriboga**

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Ecuador



**Annex to the letter dated 15 June 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Bahrain, Belgium, Canada and Ecuador to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Statement of support to the Secretary-General's policy brief on the coronavirus disease (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, António Guterres, for countries to put mental health front and centre 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 well-being 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 front-line health-care 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 Sustainable Development Goal 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 promoting 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 United Nations 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 United Nations 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.

## List of sponsors

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