

MUNA AL HUSSEIN

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS MUNA AL-HUSSEIN

**WHO PATRON FOR NURSING AND MIDWIFERY
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

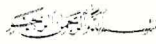
**RESUMED SESSION OF THE SEVENTY-THIRD WORLD
HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

9 NOVEMBER 2020

(as delivered)

President of the World Health Assembly,
Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is truly an honor to address you at this virtual World Health Assembly: especially it being the *International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife*.



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I have been championing the important role that nurses and midwives play in our societies for many years. My first engagement was almost 58 years ago, in 1962.

These two professions are very close to my heart. As such, I was deeply pleased to see the World Health Assembly's decision to designate 2020 as a year to celebrate, build evidence and commit to action.

An International Year provides a focus. It can drive collective action. It is a valuable tool for the Assembly. In addition, in 2020 it has been an inspirational year for millions of nurses and midwives.

The Year's celebrations began in January. Royalty, Presidents, Prime Ministers, religious leaders and many others acknowledged the importance of this special Year.

But already by the end of January with the declaration of COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, it became clear that celebrations would take a different form than we had envisioned.

From February and March onwards, we witnessed those moments when, all around the world, citizens gathered on their balconies and in the streets to applaud nurses, midwives, and health and care workers.

The celebration has rightfully included all health workers who courageously, selflessly and relentlessly fought – and continue to fight - against COVID-19.

I am reminded of one of my favorite quotes by the late Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran:



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"You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give".

These health workers give of themselves daily. Many have jeopardized their own health, safety and life to ensure ours. They truly give and continue to give despite the stress, anxiety and burnout that many are facing.

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Dr Tedros, ministers, delegates...

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused human suffering across the world. Education has been paused. Jobs have been lost. Whole economies stunted.

Politicians and leaders now understand that without health our societies and economies are built upon but shifting sands.

Access to health care is a right not a privilege for the society.

In this context, I humbly present two proposals for your consideration:

First, within any recovery or stimulus measure, leaders must prioritize their health systems.

We must be honest in our national dialogues. COVID -19 has exposed the fragility and failures of the preparedness of most health systems.



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Even the most developed countries in terms of economy have faced the same issues experienced by low and middle-income countries.

Every country has to better prepare to provide health services and manage the pandemic.

Preventable diseases do not stop killing young children.

Mothers do not stop having babies.

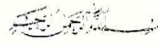
Cancer continues to require treatment.

Our elders still require health and care services.

And in addition to this –and esteemed colleagues I stress the ‘...in...addition...’ once a new COVID-19 vaccine is available we will be faced with the staggering task of vaccinating billions of people: including our elders, vulnerable individuals and essential workers in health, education and other public services.

No country will succeed without properly preparing their health system.

All countries need a system that delivers public health, primary care, preparedness and response. A system that delivers integrated health and care services. A system that delivers health and well-being for all of its population.



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Second, the best strategies and plans will not succeed without the people to deliver them.

When I talk of people, I am referring to the health and care workers: our doctors, our nurses, our midwives, our pharmacists and the many other wonderful professions and occupations.

In 2006, the World Health Assembly identified a global health workforce crisis: with insufficient numbers and distribution around the world. The Assembly committed to take action.

When Ebola came and health workers died in their hundreds, the Assembly committed to take action.

Now the COVID-19 pandemic is here, and once more dear friends, health workers are dying, but this time in their thousands: the majority of which are nurses.

Never have health workers been *applauded* and *recognized* to the extent they were in 2020: they are the world's 'heroines' and 'heroes'.

However, applause without action is no longer acceptable.

Recognition without rights and proper remuneration is not sufficient.

A resolution without implementation is not governance.

We must invest in health workers.



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We must invest in educating and employing more health workers to ensure every mother, child, student, partner and grandparent has access to safe health services.

We must invest in fair pay and protection of health and care workers.

We must invest in a health workforce that will help the world recover.

And with 70% of the world's health workers being women, we must invest in truly transformative gender, equity and rights policies.

Ladies and gentlemen...since 1962 it has been my privilege to participate in the rewarding work of the World Health Organization.

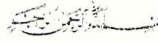
I have watched the leadership of this World Health Assembly step up when faced with the daunting global challenges of the day.

I recall the eradication of smallpox in the late 1970's and 1980. The call for *Health for All*. The fight against polio. The fight against HIV & AIDS. The call to fight Non Communicable Diseases. The call for Universal Health Coverage.

Esteemed colleagues, in 2020, the world is watching you. COVID-19 is your challenge. It has redefined your role and responsibility.

Now is the time for you to lead. In solidarity and for the greater good.

Invest in health. Invest in health system. Invest in well-being. Invest in the people who are the world's health and care workers.



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Finally, to the millions of health and care workers, including all my beloved nurses and midwives around the world, I thank you ...for your service and dedication.

Remember you have always been and will always be **MY HEROES**///

Thank you.