

**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

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) 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 recalls 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*¹.
- 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”² and both are clearly implicated when one is “[m]indful of the strong links between non-communicable diseases and poverty”³. 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.

¹ UNGA A/65/L.27 ² WHO/WHA53.17 (PP3) ³ WHO/EB128/Conf. Paper No. 10 Rev.1, 24 Jan. 2011, PP17