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ICN calls for increased international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

Geneva, Switzerland; 24 June 2022 - Following conversations with the Afghanistan Nurses Association (ANA), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) has reiterated its call for international humanitarian aid to support health systems and health workers, and its concerns over women's progress and the threat to delivery of health services. ICN says the situation in Afghanistan has been exacerbated by recent severe weather and natural disasters, compounded by the deadly earthquake this week.

ICN [last reported](#) on the situation in Afghanistan in September 2021, after the Afghanistan Nurses Association had spoken to ICN directly, emphasising the high level of uncertainty in the country which was adding stress to an already weak health system. The ANA also spoke at the ICN Congress in November, highlighting their fears over numerous barriers including the delivery of health care.

ICN President Dr Pamela Cipriano expressed ICN's increasing concerns, saying:

“We are greatly distressed to hear of this latest disaster which has struck Afghanistan at a time when their health system is already suffering. Threats to gender equality are also putting access to health care delivery at risk and are inextricably linked to the rights of nurses, and to the strength of health systems and economies.”

“Afghanistan is facing both a humanitarian and a health crisis and we are calling on the international community to take action and provide aid,” added ICN CEO, Howard Catton.

‘The health system is on the brink of collapse, and many health care workers have fled the country. We are witnessing the critical importance of humanitarian aid and support to keep the health system functioning.

‘ICN remains in contact with the ANA and we are looking at how we may be able to support the nurses of Afghanistan through our [Humanitarian Fund](#).’

ANA emphasized the dire need to sustain health care services in the country through supporting nurses financially, developing their capacity, and ensuring gender equity. The association said that Afghan culture demands that males needing health care be cared for by male nurses, and females needing health care be cared for by female nurses. Therefore, re-opening the girls' school is vital for the future of nursing and healthcare in Afghanistan.

Lack of aid can have devastating consequences, as seen in [Tigray, Ethiopia](#) where patients and health workers are at risk of starvation. Earlier this month, ICN and the Ethiopian Nurses Association [highlighted](#) the dire situation of nurses and health care services in the region.

Many other humanitarian organisations have expressed concerns about the situation in Afghanistan. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

has called for increased global support to stem surging levels of hunger and poverty that threaten millions in Afghanistan.

Dr Mohammad Nabi Burhan, Secretary General of Afghan Red Crescent, said: “A lack of food should not be a cause of death in Afghanistan. There needs to be a concerted international effort to continue critical humanitarian assistance across the country so that lives can be saved.”

In a statement to the Human Rights Council on 15 June, the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet said, “Limiting women’s freedom of movement negatively impacts almost all aspects of their lives, including the ability of women and their children to access and to participate in health services, livelihood and humanitarian aid.”ⁱ

Human Rights Watchⁱⁱ has reported that Afghans are dying from lack of medicine and that the collapsing health care system will be particularly harmful to women.

ICN urges its national nursing association members, as well as individual nurses and the general public, to support nurses in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ukraine and other areas of conflict in need of humanitarian aid via the [ICN Humanitarian Fund](#).

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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.

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ⁱ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (15 June 2022). “High Commissioner updates the Human Rights Council on Afghanistan. Available [here](#)

ⁱⁱ Abbasi F (9 May 2022). *Afghans Dying from Lack of Medicine*. Human Rights Watch. Available [here](#)

