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## **EMBARGO until 00:30 CEST on Thu, 21 May 2020**

### **Governments must act to curb violence against nurses who are working with COVID-19 patients**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 21 May 2020** – Violence against nurses and other healthcare workers has always been a serious issue, but it should never be accepted as part of the job, states an article published in *The Lancet* today, co-authored by International Council of Nurses (ICN) Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton. The article calls on governments to act swiftly to protect front line nurses from violence and abuse and makes concrete recommendations.

In recent weeks, ICN has been hearing from its network of national nurses' associations about highly concerning reports of increasing violence aimed specifically at nurses and other healthcare workers who are on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nurses have been ostracised, abused and even physically attacked because they have been in close contact with COVID-19 patients. It goes without saying that such attacks are completely unacceptable under any circumstances.

*The Lancet* article also outlines actions needed to protect nurses working on the front line of the pandemic. Mr. Catton, who wrote the article with colleagues from Physicians for Human Rights and the World Medical Association, said:

“Whatever the reasons for such aggression and violence, and I suspect that much of it is the result of misinformation and ignorance, nurses are being put at increased risk at a time when their communities need them more than ever.”

During a recent ICN webinar with nurses from Central and Latin America, one nurse from Mexico said she and her colleagues had been ostracised by members of their community.

She said many people in Mexico either believed that COVID-19 was a hoax or feared that nurses were spreading the infection in the community. Her colleagues had been sprayed with bleach or had hot coffee thrown at them on their way to and from work.

Mr Catton continued:

“Nurses are already in a high-risk situation, especially those working in close proximity to patients with COVID-19 without adequate personal protective equipment. But the fact that they fear physical attacks and abuse on their journeys to and from work is completely unacceptable. We are calling on governments to take a zero-tolerance approach and to immediately take action to stop these attacks and provide safe passage for these key workers so that they can have the peace of mind they deserve. As with infection rates amongst healthcare workers related to COVID-19, it is essential that we have data on all these attacks, whether physical or psychological, because without the data we cannot adequately create a strategy to prevent them. These attacks are wrong and reprehensible but also at a time, when we have a shortfall of six

million nurses and need to be attracting more to the profession, this is a message we can ill-afford to hear.”

*The Lancet* article makes recommendations on what governments need to do to reduce such attacks on nurses and ensure that perpetrators of violence against any healthcare workers are dealt with properly by the appropriate authorities.

It calls for:

- The collection of data on the incidence and types of attacks on healthcare personnel, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Such attacks against healthcare personnel to be prevented and, when they do occur, condemned.
- Misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 to be countered.
- The enforcement of strong actions against perpetrators of attacks by local and national governments.
- Investment by state and local governments in health security measures to protect healthcare workers as part of COVID-19 emergency budgets.
- Unity among health professionals and their associations in speaking out forcefully against all acts of discrimination, intimidation and violence against healthcare workers.

The full Lancet article can be found [here](#).

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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.

For more information please contact Gyorgy Madarasz, Press Officer at [madarasz@icn.ch](mailto:madarasz@icn.ch)  
Tel: +41 22 908 01 16

or

Richard Elliott, Director of Communications and Events, at [elliott@icn.ch](mailto:elliott@icn.ch)  
Tel: +41 79 900 55 43

[www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch)