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ICN calls on UN to make a Declaration on Pandemic Preparedness and set up a Global Health Threats Council

Geneva, Switzerland, 9 June 2021 – After the grim confirmation that at least 115,000 health and care workers have died during the pandemic, ICN is calling on the United Nations to make a Declaration on Pandemic Preparedness and create a supra-governmental body to oversee global responses to international health emergencies.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton made the call in a letter to United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, endorsing the findings of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR), which was set up by the World Health Organization (WHO) to critically examine the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The letter urges Mr Guterres to spearhead a global response that will ensure that health and care workers are never forced to make similar sacrifices ever again.

Mr Catton said: “The confirmation that at least 115,000 healthcare workers have died from COVID-19 since the outbreak of the pandemic equates to more than 200 deaths per day. That is the equivalent of a daily airline disaster, yet no one is looking for the detailed data, the black box flight recorders that would help us to understand the causes, take action to protect healthcare workers and prevent further deaths. If this were happening in any other sector of our economies there would be an emergency response, an official inquiry, and commitments to put people’s safety first.

‘Healthcare workers go to work to care for and save the lives of others: that should not mean that their safety, human rights and health are worth any less than those of others.

‘WHO has worked tirelessly and effectively with national health ministries throughout the pandemic. But what is required now is a supra-national approach, in coordination with WHO, to harness the power of whole governments, not just health ministries, to mobilise a truly global response to protect the healthcare workforce of today, and to prepare for future global health emergencies. This is now an urgent issue of global safety and security, and that is why we are asking the United Nations to lead a global response.’

Mr Catton said the single most important issue right now is making sure that nurses and other healthcare workers are vaccinated as a priority group.

“When we ask why healthy young people and even children are being vaccinated in some countries, while in others, nurses, healthcare workers and the vulnerable are still waiting for vaccination, the answer we hear is that the first responsibility of any government is to look after its own people first. The consequences of such decisions will be that more nurses, healthcare workers and the vulnerable in other countries will become severely ill and die.

‘A purely nationalistic approach will result in the emergence of more variants that could be more dangerous and even render vaccines ineffective. This is not the Olympics: it should not be a race between nations. It should be a combined global effort that requires a worldwide solution that only the United Nations can deliver.’”

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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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