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Nurses must be prioritised once COVID-19 vaccine available

Geneva, Switzerland, 27 July 2020 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is calling on governments to acknowledge the essential role of nurses and other healthcare workers by prioritising them once vaccines against COVID-19 become available.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“This is the morally and ethically right thing to do for frontline healthcare workers, but also to safeguard healthcare systems that are threatened by the ongoing pandemic, which has not yet reached its peak, and prepare for the threat of a second wave.”

ICN has estimated that 8% of all COVID-19 cases are among healthcare workers, and the World Health Organization (WHO) believes it could be up to 10%, which is 1.5 million cases and rising. The danger is far from over and ICN is still receiving worrying reports from its National Nurses Associations about lack of testing, lack of adequate quality personal protective equipment (PPE), healthcare systems under extreme pressure and staff working long hours and experiencing high levels of stress.

Mr. Catton added:

“No excuses, no ifs or buts: nurses and other healthcare workers must be prioritised when a vaccine is available so that their health and wellbeing, and that of their patients and the healthcare systems they work in, are protected.

‘Employers owe nurses a duty of care and they should never be exposed to any unnecessary risk in the course of their work. Nurses have human and worker rights, including the right to be safe at work. Yet nurses from around the world have told us about shortages of PPE, a shortfall of testing, the intensity and pressure that they are working under, and a lack of adequate mental health support. All clear examples of where governments have been slow or failed to prioritise health workers.

‘The current dire situation is compounded by the lack of systematic data on infection rates and deaths among healthcare workers, which ICN has been calling for since March. This does raise a serious question as to why governments have been slow to take this action.

‘Governments must prioritise the protection of nurses and other healthcare workers so that they can get on with their job of caring for the sick and preventing the spread of the virus. It is the right thing to do and it will protect patients and help to safeguard the healthcare systems nurses work in, which are creaking under the strain of the pandemic.’

ICN is making this call to governments at a time when we are seeing significant local outbreaks of the virus, increases in parts of Africa and the Americas, and the potential for an even more damaging second wave.

ICN has been working closely with its 130 National Nurses Associations since the beginning of the outbreak of the virus to coordinate its actions, including supporting and leading country responses, as well as advocating for nurses’ rights. Solidarity amongst the national associations in the face of the pandemic has been immense, as has the support of the public but now we need to see an upsurge of solidarity for nurses by governments through action.

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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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