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## **ICN says health workers will have to deal with consequences if COP26 Declaration fails to deliver**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 12 November 2021** – In the final countdown to the COP26 Declaration, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) says the perfect storm of climate change and COVID-19 on top of already weakened health systems will put an increasing heavy burden on exhausted nurses and other health professionals. ICN CEO Howard Catton said whatever the outcome of the agreement today there were going to be increasing demands on the planet, our health systems and our nurses.

ICN is calling for nurses and other healthcare workers to be included at the centre of climate change policymaking, underscoring that climate change is a health issue. As COP26 closes and leaders look ahead to COP27 next year, ICN says it is more important than ever that the voice of health professionals is heard on the climate change debate because if nothing changes nurses and health systems will suffer the consequences.

Mr Catton said “Nurses are intervening in the climate change debate like never before because they are witnessing the health impact. We are not reframing the climate change as a health crisis, it has always been a health issue, it’s nurses and health care professionals that have had to care for the people, have looked at the cause and the cause is climate change. Climate change, COVID-19 and increasing health demands as a result of growing and ageing populations are a perfect storm threatening to sweep our fragile and underfunded health systems away. Our nurses stand in the eye of this storm and understand better than anyone what must be done and in the run up to COP27 next year nurses and health professionals pledge to be more strident than ever because what they have to contribute matters.

‘300 organisations, including ICN, representing at least **45 million nurses, doctors and health professionals worldwide** [signed an open letter](#) to the 197 government leaders and national delegations at COP26. The letter warns that the climate crisis is the single biggest health threat facing humanity and calls on world leaders to deliver on climate action.

‘Lots of countries are missing a trick by not having nurses involved in policy decision making around climate change. Nurses are the eyes and ears on the ground, they understand the problems and they know the solutions, they are trusted by the public, and if you are trying to make up policy on global warming without including the nursing voice you are flying blind. As COP26 closes governments must firmly commit to engaging with their healthcare professionals on the issue of climate change and health for the good of all humankind.

‘It is not just that nurses see the effects of climate change: ICN’s new Code of Ethics has a section on global health, and it refers to nurses’ role in preserving and sustaining the natural environment. So, climate change is not just about nurses in practice, but also the principles that underpin nursing practice.’

Mr Catton made the comments during a meeting at the United Nations COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, speaking alongside colleagues from the World Health Organization

(WHO) and the Global Climate and Health Alliance. Mr Catton and ICN's Senior Advisor on Nursing and Health Policy, Erica Burton also co-hosted an event as part of the COP26 WHO Health Pavilion programme, broadcasting live from Glasgow and virtually, with the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE), engaging nurses, health professionals, and those working at the intersection of climate change and health.

Ms Burton said "With 27 million of us, we have a loud and important voice to advocate for climate change action. Nurses are and can be powerful leaders to create climate resilient health systems, raise awareness within the nursing profession and communities of the impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing, take action to mitigate climate change and support people and communities to adapt to its impacts.

'Health care professionals are patient and community advocates, so we can be the voice for climate-vulnerable populations. For example, when we're in the community caring for older people and people experiencing homelessness who have heat exhaustion, heat stroke and worsening mental health from more frequent and intense heat waves that are happening in countries from the Western Pacific all the way up to the North of the globe.

'Nurses are witnessing and already responding to the effects of climate change on health and wellbeing and, as with the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses and healthcare professionals will be the ones who will be called on to care for communities as health and social conditions worsen from the impacts of climate change. This time, we must be central to the discussions to prevent and respond to this crisis."

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#### **Notes 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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