



UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Sixty-fifth session

Building back better – women’s participation and leadership in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response and recovery

Interactive Dialogue

March 18, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Council of Nurses, a federation of National Nurses Associations in over 130 countries and the global voice of nursing representing the over 27 million nurses worldwide.

Gender inequalities are deeply embedded into health and social systems, compromising their strength and quality and leading to a failure to meet the needs of populations around the world. For the nursing profession, gender bias has led to chronic undervaluing and underinvestment and the full potential of nurses not being used. Furthermore, these inequalities cause direct harm – evidence gathered by ICN at the beginning of the year shows nurses are suffering mass traumatisation from unsafe working conditions, high rates of COVID-19 infection, burnout, psychological distress, abuse, and violence. At least 3000 nurses have died of COVID-19, a number that is a gross underestimate due to the lack of data.

90% of the nursing workforce are women. Nurses have played a leading role in the COVID-19 response and, as such, it is women who have been on the frontlines of this pandemic. Though they are the majority, women hold only 25% of leadership roles in health. The increased and strengthened involvement and leadership of nurses in COVID-19 response and recovery is essential to building back better and to preventing similar failures during future global crises. To this end, governments should take immediate steps to ensure a senior nurse in the government who is responsible to give strategic advice on all aspects of health policy and who is involved in high-level decision-making.

Governments should also take the following actions to ensure gender-responsive decision-making in COVID-19 response and recovery:

- Ensure nurses and all women are paid equal pay for equal work and close the gender pay gap.
- Ensure safe and decent working conditions for nurses including adequate personal protective equipment and procedures and protection from violence and abuse.
- Adopt a gender-responsive approach to health security data collection/analysis and response management.
- Develop policies supporting nurse-led models of care and advanced practice roles, allowing nurses to work to their full scope of practice.