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International Council of Nurses 23rd Asia Workforce Forum (AWFF) Communiqué

12–13 November 2025, Beijing, China

Preamble

The 23rd Asia Workforce Forum (AWFF), jointly organized by the **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** and the **Chinese Nursing Association (CNA)**, was convened in **Beijing, China**, on **12–13 November 2025**.

The Forum brought together nursing leaders and representatives from **13 national or regional nursing associations** across Asia to exchange experiences, share strategies, and strengthen regional collaboration.

Context

Participants acknowledged significant global progress in nursing workforce policy and leadership, particularly underscored by the publication of the second **State of the World's Nursing Report (SOWN 2025)**, which outlines both the achievements and the continuing challenges in developing a sustainable global nursing workforce. It is noteworthy that the countries and regions represented by the nursing associations participating in this Forum collectively account for **approximately 14 million nurses**, highlighting the substantial scale and importance of the nursing profession across Asia and beyond.

The report indicates that although the global nursing workforce has reached approximately **30 million**, a **shortfall of 5.8 million nurses** persists and is projected to

remain at **4.1 million by 2030**. The distribution of nurses worldwide is uneven, with a particularly low concentration in Southeast Asia.

Participants welcomed the continued implementation of the **Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (2021–2030)**, the adoption of ICN's **new Definition of Nurse and Nursing**, and the **ICN Charter for Change**, which articulates ten strategic priorities for action.

Delegates reaffirmed that **investment in nursing** is integral to resilient health systems, generating significant social and economic returns and serving as a cornerstone for the attainment of **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Key Issues Discussed

1. Nursing Workforce Shortages and Ageing

All nursing associations reported persistent workforce shortages driven by **demographic ageing, rising chronic disease burdens, and increasing demands for complex care**. Several countries highlighted declining workforce participation rates and uneven regional distribution. Participants underscored the need for robust national policies to ensure effective recruitment, retention, and equitable deployment of nurses across all health settings.

2. Education Reform and Workforce Development

Delegates shared substantial national reforms aimed at strengthening nursing education and training capacity, including establishing new institutions, upgrading entry-level qualifications, and expanding continuing professional development

opportunities. Participants emphasized that **education quality, competency-based training, and leadership cultivation** are fundamental to ensuring safe, competent, and future-oriented nursing practice.

3. Safety, Well-being and Mental Health

Delegates voiced concerns regarding workplace violence, excessive workloads, and increasing psychological stress within the nursing workforce. Data presented indicated that only a limited number of countries have comprehensive policies addressing these issues. Participants called for urgent action to implement **zero-tolerance measures against violence**, improve staffing ratios, and strengthen access to **mental health and psychosocial support** for nurses.

4. Advanced Practice and Professional Autonomy

The expansion of **Advanced Practice Nursing (APN)** roles and the recognition of nurses' professional autonomy were identified as regional priorities. Participants agreed that enabling advanced practice enhances access to primary care, improves health outcomes, and strengthens nursing leadership capacity. Legislative and regulatory frameworks were deemed essential to sustain and institutionalize these roles.

5. Technology, Digital Health and Innovation

The Forum acknowledged the transformative potential of **digital health, artificial intelligence, and smart technologies** in advancing care delivery and alleviating administrative burdens. Participants urged greater investment in **digital literacy, evidence-based innovation**, and **technology-enabled models of care**, noting that

integrating nursing expertise with technological advancement is pivotal to the future of health systems.

6. Ethical International Recruitment and Mobility

Delegates expressed concern over increasing patterns of nurse migration and widening disparities between source and destination countries. The Forum reaffirmed its support for the **WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel**, calling for **equitable partnerships, transparency in recruitment processes**, and the **reinvestment of resources** by destination countries into the nursing education systems of source nations.

7. Climate Change, Disasters and Conflict Response

Participants emphasized the expanding role of nurses in disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and climate resilience. The Forum underscored the importance of building capacity for **community-based disaster preparedness, emergency response**, and **sustainable health care**, aligning with global efforts to safeguard both people and the planet.

8. CNO Role and Leadership Pipeline

Delegates suggested that governments should establish the CNO role and ensure CNOs have both the budget and authority to lead efforts in strengthening the nursing profession, as well as ensuring a robust pipeline of leadership development programmes for future nurse leaders.

9. Ensuring every country has a national plan to strengthen nursing and enhancing regional level collaboration

Less than half of the associations reported the existence of a national plan for nursing and many reported that plans in place showed weak alignment to the global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (SDNMs). Robust national plans developed in collaboration with National Nursing Associations (NNAs) and nurse leaders with explicit political support are both essential and would reflect the unanimous support countries gave to extend and accelerate progress on delivering the SDNMs at the WHO World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2025.

Forum delegates also recognized the great value in sharing and learning across regions and developing collaborative approaches.

Regional Priorities and Commitments

Participants collectively:

- **Reaffirmed** that nurses are central to achieving **Universal Health Coverage** and the **Sustainable Development Goals**;
- **Urged governments** to increase **investment** in nursing education, leadership, and workforce sustainability;
- **Called for enhanced regional collaboration** in nursing research, leadership development, and digital health integration;
- **Committed** to advancing **APN recognition**, ensuring equitable remuneration, and strengthening supportive regulation;
- **Advocated** for national policies to secure **safe and healthy work environments**, including protection against workplace violence and the promotion of mental well-being;
- **Encouraged ethical international recruitment practices** and fair global workforce partnerships;

- **Recognized** the importance of **innovation, technology, and leadership** in shaping the future of nursing across Asia;
- **Recognized** the vital **relationship between educational institutions and hospitals** in the training and development of nursing professionals;
- **Determined** that each country must have a **national nursing workforce plan** to strengthen the profession and align with the global SDNMs;
- **Highlighted** that government investment in nursing leadership is a cornerstone of women's education, helping to **address gender inequality**, and that such leadership investment yields dual benefits, advancing both the healthcare system and medical education;
- **Asserted** that **nurses' pay is low** across the region and requires urgent action to improve, noting that the return on investment is improved population health and economic growth.

Conclusion

The 23rd Asia Workforce Forum concluded with a shared vision of a **united, empowered, and innovative nursing community** across Asia – one that leads the transformation of health systems, advances professional excellence, and promotes health equity for all populations.

Participants expressed appreciation to the **International Council of Nurses** and the **Chinese Nursing Association** for their leadership and partnership in convening this Forum.