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Written Statement by International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO pays tribute to the world's health workers, recognizing their critical role during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond, responding to the call of duty with determination and dedication.

In this sense, we welcome the timely adoption of 2021 as the Year of Health and Care Workers as a means of global recognition and awareness-raising on the central importance of health workers for societies. The campaign themes *#Protect. #Invest. #Together.* bring to the fore the need for investments in health employment and for ensuring protection and decent work, topics that are at the core of ILO's mandate.

Decent work is a prerequisite to equal access to health services and quality health care. Without health workers, achieving Universal Health Coverage and SDG3 will not be possible. Programmes to protect health workers from occupational hazards and risks in their daily work and in emergencies are indispensable. Too many of these dedicated workers are facing undue risks to their health and lives while caring for their communities and patients.

The COVID-19 crisis vividly exposed the long-standing structural problems in already overburdened and underfunded public health systems in many countries. It has been recognized that the health and care sectors have been struggling because of limited resources and the implementation of cost-saving measures. The UN High-level Commission on Health, Employment and Economic Growth highlighted the urgent need for sustainable investments in health systems, and investments in strong health workforces that can do their jobs under decent working conditions. This need is more urgent than ever and there is now global momentum for investing in increased health employment and decent work in the health sector.

The health sector is an important employment sector and contributes to job creation in other economic sectors, and thereby to economic growth. It is time for a paradigm shift so that the role of the health sector in economic development and employment creation is recognized.

The ILO joined forces with WHO and OECD in the *Working for Health* Programme to assist countries in unlocking this potential.

We remain committed to drive forward a health and care workforce agenda that is aligned with the SDGs and the goal of Universal Health Coverage, and the commitments of the High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth. The recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic must be driven by a human-centred approach that respects human and labour rights, while supporting economic and social recovery.

The discussions on the global strategic directions for nursing and midwifery 2021–2025 are particularly timely and coincide with the ongoing ILO General Survey on standards promoting decent work in the care economy, including the Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977 (No. 149) and its Recommendation No. 157.



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