



## **Joint Press Release**

### **Afghanistan appeals for increased, improved care for people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders**

**10 OCTOBER 2010 | Kabul, AFGHANISTAN** – On the occasion of World Mental Health Day, Afghan government officials, the World Health Organization and the European Commission reinforced the need to take action and make progress against mental, neurological and substance use disorders amongst Afghans.

More than 50% of Afghans, most of whom are women, suffer from psychosocial problems or mental disorders. Yet only a fraction of the health budget is spent on mental health. As a result of this lack of investment, which has also led to a chronic shortage of trained mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, psychiatric social workers and counselors mainly in rural areas, a large majority of people with these disorders receive no care at all

Her Excellency Dr Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health urged the donor community to rapidly increase funding that will afford the Afghan health system to, inter alia, achieve a higher coverage of mental health services and close the treatment gap.

This year's theme, 'Mental health and long term illness: the need for continued and integrated care' underscores the message that improvement in mental health services does not require sophisticated and expensive technologies. What is required is increasing the capacity of the primary health care system for delivery of an integrated package of care.

"Placing the ability to diagnose and treat mental health patients into the primary health care system will significantly increase the number of people who can access care," stressed Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan." WHO stands ready to provide technical support to Afghan health authorities to implement and further develop basic mental health services."

An estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. People with mental, neurological and substance use disorders are often stigmatized and subject to neglect and abuse.

"Mental wellbeing of Afghans is important for peace and development in Afghanistan. In addition to treatment, what is required is improving social services for people with mental and psychosocial disabilities," said Dr Dalil.

"Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness, a sense of purpose and well being is vital to individuals, families and the community at large. Openly addressing mental health as a key issue for the country by the highest authorities lends itself to advocacy, and should result in increased fund raising, awareness, community mobilization, better services, better compliance, and improved quality of life. This will reduce stigma and improve human rights of people with psychiatric disorder. People will feel that the authorities are concerned about their psychosocial well being." added Graaff.

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