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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

10 October 2011

There is no health without mental health. Mental disorders are major contributors to illness and premature death, and are responsible for 13 percent of the global disease burden. With the global economic downturn – and associated austerity measures – the risks for mental ill-health are rising around the globe.

Poverty, unemployment, conflict and war all adversely affect mental health. In addition, the chronic, disabling nature of mental disorders often places a debilitating financial burden on individuals and households. Furthermore, individuals with mental health problems – and their families – endure stigma, discrimination and victimization, depriving them of their political and civil rights and constraining their ability to participate in the public life of their societies.

Resources allocated for mental health by governments and civil society are habitually too little, both in human and financial terms. Recent data from the World Health Organisation clearly show that the proportion of health budgets devoted to mental health is inadequate. Most low- and middle-income countries spend less than 2 per cent, and many countries have less than one mental health specialist per one million people.

The theme of this World Mental Health Day is “Investing in mental health”. We cannot expect improvement in global mental health statistics unless we increase financial and other support for promoting mental health and providing adequate services to those who need them. Deaths, disability and distress caused by mental disorders need to find their rightful place in the public health agenda.

Mental illnesses can be treated effectively. We have the knowledge. Feasible, affordable and cost-effective measures for preventing and treating mental disorders exist, and are being implemented, for example through WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP). However, if we are to move decisively from evidence to action, we need strong leadership, enhanced partnerships and the commitment of new resources. Let us pledge today to invest in mental health. The returns will be substantial.