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## **Gender inequalities exposed by COVID-19 International Council of Nurses challenges gender bias against nurses**

### ***ICN releases e-report on its work during COVID-19***

**Geneva, Switzerland, 17 March 2021** – Annette Kennedy, President of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), has spoken out against the unacceptable inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, for the nursing profession, as well as women in general.

“The lack of investment in, respect for, and abuse of nurses can no longer be tolerated.” said Ms Kennedy. “As we look back on the past year of the pandemic, we see call after call for protection, decent pay and acceptable working conditions for this 90% female workforce being ignored by governments and policy makers all over the world.

‘Women, and especially nurses, have shouldered the majority of the care of the ill and dying, along with increased childcare, yet we see rates of violence and abuse against women are on the rise, and nurses are continuing to put their lives at risk for a low-paid, undervalued job. It is time for our demands to be taken seriously.’

‘I am also concerned about the impending exodus from the profession of nurses who have been traumatised by caring for patients with COVID-19. There is a world-wide shortage of six million nurses, and a further four million are due to retire in the next decade. If we factor in the COVID Effect in addition that could leave health services with only half the nurses they currently have if drastic action is not taken. The consequence of this on health systems and economy around the world could be even worse than the pandemic.’

ICN has released an [online publication](#) detailing the work it undertook in 2020 to advocate and lobby for the support and protection of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the early days when the virus started in China through to the deaths of 1.7 million people worldwide by the end of 2020, the report provides a month-by-month diary of this extraordinary year when nurses faced unbelievable hardships and were simultaneously praised and abused for their work. Now the applause has faded, and governments have made no moves to reward nurses with more than words.

Taking up the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day, #ChooseToChallenge, Ms Kennedy said:

“Over the past year, ICN has called for adequate supplies of protective equipment, for the virus to be considered an occupational disease, for governments to speak out against attacks on nurses, for nurses to be part of pandemic taskforces and decision-making, and for nurses and other healthcare workers in every country to be prioritised for the vaccine. Yet these calls

are still not always being heeded. ICN is challenging this inherent bias against the female dominated profession of nursing.”

The e-publication honours the thousands of nurses who have died as a result of COVID-19. ICN has also released reports on the [mass trauma](#) experienced by the nursing profession as a result of the pandemic, and on the [nursing shortage](#) including the increase in nurses intention to leave the profession due to burnout and distress.

Since the start of the pandemic, ICN has drawn unprecedented media attention to the plight of nurses, raising the profile of the profession, and demanding governments protect and support nurses. With links to ICN reports, press releases and videos, this e-publication is illustrated by inspiring photographs of nurses in action and brings personal stories from nurses on the frontlines across the globe. It is a reminder of everything the members of this incredible profession have gone through and how much more remains to be done.

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#### **Note to Editors**

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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