



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fourth session

Agenda item 123

### Strengthening of the United Nations system

#### **Identical letters dated 29 June 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Bahrain, Belgium, Canada and Ecuador to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly**

Following up on our letter dated 15 June 2020, we, as Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of Mental Health and Well-being, have the honour to transmit a finalized list of signatories in support of the attached joint statement supporting the Secretary-General's policy brief on the need for action on mental health (see annex).

We are pleased with the support and strong efforts made by many Member States and wish for this initiative to promote and address discrepancies in tackling mental health issues.

We would kindly request that the statement, together with the complete list of sponsors, be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 123.

*(Signed)* Jamal Fares **Alrowaiei**  
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain

*(Signed)* Marc **Pecsteen de Buytsverve**  
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Belgium

*(Signed)* Marc-André **Blanchard**  
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Canada

*(Signed)* Luis **Gallegos Chiriboga**  
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Ecuador



**Annex to the identical letters dated 29 June 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Bahrain, Belgium, Canada and Ecuador to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly**

**Statement of support to the Secretary-General's policy brief on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the need for action on mental health**

1. In the face of the unprecedented spread of COVID-19, we, a cross-regional group of countries, strongly support the appeal by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, for countries to put mental health front and centre of their responses to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we welcome the release of the policy brief entitled "COVID-19 and the need for action on mental health", which sends a strong and clear message on the importance of the issue to the international community and sets guidelines on how countries should promote and address mental health issues as part of the COVID-19 response.

2. We express our deep concern regarding the impact the pandemic has had on mental health and well-being of whole societies. The situation has been exacerbated by the consequences of the precautionary measures taken almost globally, by worry related to death and the spread of the disease, physical isolation, poverty and economic anxiety produced by the pandemic. This situation is further exacerbated by a historic underinvestment in mental health promotion, prevention and care before the pandemic.

3. We recognize that mental health issues do not affect just one specific group in society, but impacts different groups, notably children, young people, women and people in humanitarian and conflict settings, older adults and people with pre-existing health conditions, first responders and front-line health-care workers.

4. We support the recommended actions underlined by the Secretary-General and stress that tackling mental health should be an essential component of national responses to COVID-19. The opportunity should be seized to include mental health policies into the general health narrative, which can once and for all end the stigma surrounding the issue of mental health.

5. At this decisive juncture, now more than ever the global community must remain focused on accelerating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, including its associated target that provides for reducing by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promoting mental health and well-being by 2030. To that end, our efforts must be redirected to the immediate challenge of strengthening our collective action to combat the pandemic using effective strategies.

6. We commend the United Nations for scaling up its mental health and psychosocial response to support people to cope with COVID-19, and we express our appreciation to the World Health Organization for its leading role in coordinating pandemic preparedness and response. We encourage it to also take the lead in developing a strategy to ensure that Governments have the support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health. We call upon all United Nations agencies to ensure that they include mental health in their COVID-19 responses.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic already has and will continue to have profound mental health consequences. Addressing this issue is therefore critical for our success. We therefore commit to come together urgently to address the mental health dimension of this pandemic.

**List of sponsors**

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10. Belgium
11. Bhutan
12. Bosnia and Herzegovina
13. Brazil
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62. Norway
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