

Press Information . Communiqué de presse . Comunicado de prensa

ICN Board of Directors speaks out on Myanmar and the unacceptable scarcity of nurses at WHO

Geneva, Switzerland, 19 May 2008 – Meeting in Geneva, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Board of Directors has expressed great concern for the health of the people of Myanmar, as the military government of that country blocks the entry of foreign health and disaster response professionals.

“While aid supplies appear to be mobilised, the lack of expertise in dealing with disasters and the government’s refusal to allow entry of external volunteers able to respond to the health needs of the millions struck by cyclone Nargis is of great concern,” stated Hiroko Minami, President of ICN. “ICN fully supports the UN call to the government of Myanmar to allow foreign health experts and consultants to get to work assisting the people of Myanmar and preventing a potential horrific outbreak of infectious diseases.”

Where are the nurses at the World Health Organization?

In other important business, the Board was shocked to see an even further decline in the nursing workforce within WHO particularly at a time of increased disasters worldwide, the push to reach the Millennium Development goals, climate change, recession and increased food prices - a time when nursing knowledge and skills are so desperately needed.

“It is astonishing to note that in 1968, when global health was much less complicated, there were more than 200 nurses deployed at the WHO to assist in technical matters, yet today there are a mere 8 dedicated nursing posts, and less than 1% of all professional staff are nurses^[1],” declared Dr Minami. “This virtual absence of the nursing voice in WHO policy and technical support threatens all WHO programmes, contradicts the organisation's claim to be addressing the current global crisis in health human resources - focused mostly on nursing - and undermines the effort to increase access to primary health care for all citizens.”

Looking internally, the Board selected Melbourne, Australia as the site for ICN’s 2013 Congress. As well, in keeping with its mandate to review ICN membership models and

^[1] WHO (2007) Executive Board 122nd Session EB122/24 Add.1 Human resources: annual report. Available: www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB122/B122_24Add1-en.pdf

inclusiveness, the Board agreed on a number of recommendations which will be forward to ICN's highest governing body, the Council of National Representatives, for consideration over the coming months.

Editor's note

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of 131 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.

For further information contact Linda Carrier-Walker

Tel: +41 22 908 0100 Fax: +41 22 908 0101

email: carrwalk@icn.ch - web site www.icn.ch

ICN/PR08 #11
