Joint Statement in Recognition of

2013 World Mental Health Day and
The WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020

We, the NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York) Affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) and the NGO Forum for Health (Geneva), commend the World Health Organization (WHO) on the landmark WHO Resolution, *The Global Burden of Mental Disorders and the Need for a Comprehensive, Coordinated Response from Health and Social Sectors at the Country Level* approved by the World Health Assembly in May 2012. This promotes implementation of the recommendations of the *Comprehensive Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020*. Mental health has thus, been recognized as an integral part of the comprehensive global health agenda to protect and promote the well-being of all people.


The theme of World Mental Health Day 2013 highlights mental health and older adults. We wish to draw attention to the fact that depression and suicide rates are high in older persons. In addition, the rates of physical disorders and chronic illnesses increase with age. Therefore, integrating age related mental health services into primary care is essential if there is to be an impact on reducing the global burden of disease. This is especially important as depression is projected to be the number one burden of disease by 2030.

We commend the *WHO Mental Health Action Plan* for highlighting the inseparable linkages of mental and physical health. Not only age related conditions, but other forms of mental disorders that are associated with physical disorders such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory illness, and HIV/AIDS.

**Recommendations:**

- Whereas the vision statement of the *Global Mental Health Action Plan* is commendable, it should also underscore the linkages of mental, physical, and social health.

- Mental health and illness interact with a wide variety of environmental and social factors that may also result in poverty, homelessness, crime, violence, war, environmental degradation and disaster, economic vulnerability, unemployment, and lack of education. As such, it is imperative to integrate mental health promotion into social development strategies in order for development to be sustainable.
• Emphasis on the negative consequences of natural disasters and war should not overshadow the fact that violence in the home and sexual assault in the street are the most commonly experienced causes of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and of daily suffering for the greatest number of people.

• Supporting the mental health of women and girls who bear a disproportionate responsibility for care-giving is an important foundation for community well-being. Keeping mothers of young children mentally healthy and physically safe is one of the single most powerful interventions to reduce mental illness and to increase resilience, given that the mental health of women and girls can be harmed by discrimination in all its forms. The psychosocial and health needs of older caregivers must also be addressed.

• Primary health care workers must be trained in basic mental health care principles to support mental health specialists in providing care. Culturally relevant approaches should be included in interventions and treatment wherever appropriate.

• Strong accountability mechanisms must be established to measure the actions and implementation of steps by Member States to achieve outcome goals. These mechanisms must be tied to timely global reporting measures to be acted upon and revised regularly to achieve established goals.

• Adequate financial resources must be budgeted by governments to make available mental health services for all people. This is essential to address the mushrooming burden of diseases which threatens to potentially bankrupt the economies of vulnerable countries.

• Effective social change requires the inclusion of all actors. Member states and WHO should embrace the active engagement of civil society and the contribution it can make to the future well-being of all. In this respect, we commend the request for feedback from civil society organizations on the *Global Mental Health Action Plan*. This information feedback mechanism must be ongoing to insure future success of the implementation of the Action Plan.

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