**UN Human Rights Council**

**Consultation on mental health and human rights**

15 November 2021 | 10 – 12HRS & 15 – 17HRS (CEST)

Virtual meeting on Zoom platform / Room XVII Palais des Nations, Geneva

**Opening remarks by H.E. Marta Temido**

**Minister of Health of Portugal**

Madam President,

Madam UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Madam Deputy Director-General of WHO,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to participate in this consultation.

There is now a growing recognition that mental health remains a neglected area all over the world, even in developed countries, and that collective action is needed to address this situation.

The international community is becoming more aware of the multiple human rights abuses against persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities, which often occur behind closed doors.

This awareness is the first step needed to start changing this scenario. I am proud that Portugal, together with Brazil, took the initiative, back in 2016, to bring this important issue to the agenda of the Human Rights Council.

Three ground-breaking and consensual resolutions have been adopted by this Council, the latest of which requested the convening of this consultation. I take this opportunity to thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and WHO, in particular its *QualityRights* Initiative, for their support and commitment.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities laid the foundation for the much-needed paradigm shift in mental health. From an exclusively medical approach to one based on the respect of the human rights of persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities.

However, the harmonization of national laws, policies and practices related to mental health with the progressive norms of the Convention remains one of the major challenges for all States in this area.

That is why the main sponsors of the resolutions on mental health and human rights chose this topic for today’s consultation. I am sure that the recommendations emanating from today’s discussion will be very helpful to trigger this paradigm shift.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities cannot be an exception.

Madam President,

Mental health conditions affect one in four people throughout their lives. Despite its huge impact, mental health does not yet enjoy parity, including financial parity, with physical health.

Stigma is still a major barrier to the quality of care and access to the full range of services. Therefore, two thirds of people with mental health conditions do not seek support. And we must not forget that carrying a mental illness label not only affects the person with the illness, but also affects their family members and close friends.

At the same time, it is paramount to ensure that users of mental health services have their human rights respected. As foreseen at the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In Portugal, we have been making significant efforts to align our laws, policies and practice with human rights:

- Mental health is a priority for the Government’s health policies;

- We have clearly made an option for community-based mental health services instead of institutionalization. We have been improving access to outreach care, through the launching of community teams for adults and for children and adolescents;

- We launched innovative therapeutic approaches such as “Open Dialogues”;

- Users and families have been included in the National Mental Health Program team.

- Independent monitoring of mental health facilities is being carried out;

- New legislation, replacing interdiction and disqualification practices by person-centred monitoring approaches has been adopted;

- The forensic system has been reshaped through the creation of less restrictive half-way houses, fostering the integration of forensic patients in the community.

Another effort is the ongoing revision of the Portuguese Mental Health Law, making it strongly anchored on human rights. The working group responsible for its revision also includes users of mental health services and family members.

We believe that the revision of the Mental Health Law will give the issue of human rights a major focus, not only in legislation and in the reshaping of services, as well as in the full participation of users and families in defining mental health policies and decision-making processes.

Madam President,

We all know that there is no health without mental health, and there is no mental health without human rights. Let’s join efforts to make the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to mental health, a reality to all.

Thank you.