

# Open Letter endorsing the Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health



8 August 2017

Dear High Commissioner Zeid,

**Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health** [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/35/21](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/35/21).

We, a wide variety of organisations and individuals representing people with personal experience of mental health services, professionals and academics, welcome and endorse in the strongest possible terms the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Mr. Dainius Pūras, on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

This ground-breaking report is the second important commentary on mental health that has come out of the UN human rights system this year. This challenging report highlights that mental health has been a forgotten issue for far too long, leaving far too many people to suffer human rights abuses within mental health services. This most recent report goes further than the earlier report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by calling out the 'global burden of obstacles' which are preventing our mental health systems from adopting a human rights-based approach which would guarantee the right to mental health for all.

We agree with the Special Rapporteur that these obstacles include power asymmetries, the prevalence of the biomedical model and biased use of evidence within the mental health system. We therefore also welcome the Special Rapporteur's call for a shift in paradigm away from isolating mental health services which are coercive and medicalised, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to one that is recovery and community-based, promotes social inclusion and offers a range of rights-based treatments and psychosocial support at primary and specialized care levels. He also recognises the human rights imperative to invest in prevention and promotion. We endorse the Special Rapporteur's further comments that: "...a reductive neurobiological paradigm causes more harm than good, undermines the right to health, and must be abandoned.... There is a need of a shift in investments in mental health, from focusing on "chemical imbalances" to focusing on "power imbalances and inequalities."

We are living in a world of astounding - and very welcome - scientific and professional developments, which give great hope in our joint struggles to improve the health and wellbeing of all citizens. But it is also important to recognise that health is also a matter of social justice. Inequalities, poverty and abuse all impact on our physical and mental health, and the solutions are political and social as well as technical. The report rightly identifies a variety of effective practices and alternatives which situate mental health within a human rights and recovery-based paradigm and we agree that these must be scaled up and invested in.

Therefore we particularly welcome the Special Rapporteur's recognition of the fact that mental health problems are; "... strongly linked to early childhood adversities, including toxic stress and sexual, physical and emotional child abuse, as well as to inequalities and violence, including gender based inequalities and gender based violence, and many other adverse conditions which people, especially those in vulnerable situations such as poverty or social exclusion, face when their basic needs are not met and their rights are not protected."

We welcome these positive messages for a global approach to health and psychological wellbeing which ensures the participation of diversity of rights-holders and relevant stakeholders including users and survivors, civil

society and communities and empowers them. We agree with the Special Rapporteur that we need to focus on the primary prevention of suffering and ill-health, as well as the care and recovery of people who experience ill-health or distress. We therefore look forward to a future where we work together to provide a coherent, scientific, but humane and psychological vision; where we offer care rather than coercion, fight for social justice, equity and fundamental human rights, and to establish the social prerequisites for genuine mental health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely

**Mental Health Europe – Santé Mentale Europe  
British Psychological Society**

Mental Disability Advocacy Centre

Horatio (European Psychiatric Nurses)

Mental Health Perspectives (Lithuania)

Society of Social Psychiatry (Greece)

Critical Mental Health Nurses Network (UK)

Asylum Magazine (UK)

Psychosocial Research Organization (Greece)

Pro-mente Austria

Ubuntu South Africa

Promitheas NPO (Greece)

Critical Psychiatry Network (UK)

Association of Families for Mental Health (Greece)

Association of Parent Guardians and Friends of People with Autism Larissa Prefecture (Greece)

Social Care Strategic Network for Mental Health

Mad in America

Association for Regional Development and Mental Health (EPAPSY, Greece)

Social Cooperatives Activities for Vulnerable Groups (Greece)

Confederacion Salud Mental Espana

Mental Health Interest Forum (PÉF, Hungary)

The European Network of (ex)Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (ENUSP)

European Federation of Psychologists' Associations

Lithuanian Psychological Association

Finnish Association for Mental Health

International Council of Nurses

The Friendship Bench (Zimbabwe)

Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría Fundación (ESMAEN, España)

British Association of Social Workers (BASW, UK)

Law Project for Psychiatric Rights

The Social Work Action Network (SWAN) Ireland.

Friendship Bench

Hearing Voices Network Cymru

Scottish Recovery Network

Всеукраїнська громадська організація людей з інвалідністю потребителів психіатричної допомоги "ЮЗЕР" - Ukrainian public organization of people with disabilities, consumers of mental health care "users"

Society of Psychosocial Research and Intervention (S.P.R.I.; Ioannina, Greece).

Finnish Association for Mental Health

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ENUSP - European Network of (ex)users and survivors of psychiatry (ENUSP)  
Psycho-social Research Organization (E.PSY.ME) Greece  
Horatio: The Psychiatric Nurses Association of Ireland  
Association des groupes d'intervention en défense des droits en santé mentale du Québec.  
Society of Georgian Psychiatrists  
Bapu Trust for Research on Mind & Discourse  
Changes Ahead  
Mental Health Perspectives  
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National Survivor User Network (NSUN)  
Psychologist for Social Change  
International Society for the Psychosocial Approaches to Psychosis (ISPS)  
Japan National Group of Mentally Disabled People  
Association for Psychosocial Support (Susret) Croatia  
Community Housing and Therapy  
Advocacy Unlimited (Peer Run Community Organization USA)  
Intensive Interaction Denmark  
Social workers in Adult Mental Health, Republic of Ireland  
REV France  
Recovery Wirral  
Social Work Action Network (SWAN)  
Mesa Galega da Psicoloxía Clínica (Galician Bureau of Clinical Psychology)  
AGAPIR Asociación Galega de Psicólogos Internos Residentes (Galician Association of Psychological Residents)  
Psicología Clínica de España - Outsiders (Clinical Psychology of Spain - Outsiders)  
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