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Resolving the Global Nurse Migration Crisis for Resilient, Equitable Healthcare

To the Leaders of the G20,

As the President of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing more than 130 national nursing organisations, I write to you today with a grave sense of urgency regarding our worsening global nurse migration crisis and its effects upon our world's most fragile nations and healthcare systems. ICN calls upon G20's leaders to take decisive action to stem the tide of nurse migration from countries already facing severe health workforce shortages.

Several nations, including G20 members, continue to actively recruit nurses from the World Health Organisation's Health Workforce Support and Safeguards list (frequently referred to as the "red list") of nations with acute nursing deficits and vulnerable health infrastructures.

This practice threatens access to essential healthcare services in under-resourced regions, deepening global inequalities and leaving populations without sufficient nursing care.

The implications extend far beyond national borders, compromising our shared global health ambitions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and universal health coverage (UHC). We know we are already drastically off-track to meet these critical targets by 2030 as planned. Urgent interventions are needed to establish resilient, equitable health systems as the backbone of a safer, healthier, more prosperous and more sustainable world for all.

Last year, ICN declared a global health emergency due to the world's drastic shortage of millions of nurses and deep-rooted inequalities in health coverage and outcomes.

Yet the nurse migration crisis continues to escalate. At the recent World Health Assembly in Geneva, we heard alarming accounts of how the active recruitment of vulnerable nations' nurses continues to drain resources from fragile health systems and push remaining staff to breaking point, with dire impacts on population health, disease response and management, and preparedness for health emergencies. We also heard of widespread underinvestment in the nursing workforce, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), driving unemployment, poor working conditions and untenable workloads for nurses.

Faced with their own personnel shortages, we are seeing some developed countries turn to aggressive international hiring instead of creating the conditions for sustainable and self-sufficient health workforces at home. This short-sighted and unsustainable approach only distracts from tackling the root causes of the nursing shortage, which include underdeveloped training pipelines as well as the unacceptable working conditions contributing to patterns of nurse burnout, resignations, and industrial action evident in many regions.

We commend Brazil's leadership and the efforts of the current G20 Health Working Group (HWG) in making *Resilient Health Systems* the central pillar of their agenda. Introducing Brazil's G20 HWG proposals, Minister Nísia Trindade reminded us that "health is essential for building a fairer world". We are encouraged to see that recent HWG meetings highlighted the importance of safeguarding our global health workforce and acknowledged the urgent need to address the migration of health professionals from low-income countries, including strengthening the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel.

We welcome the HWG's focus on generating collective, equitable, and multilateral solutions for pandemic preparedness and response. Nurse migration must be addressed as part of this agenda, as unsustainable dependence on nurse migration undermines health system resilience and emergency preparedness in both vulnerable source countries and wealthier recruiting countries, as was evident during the Covid pandemic, when we witnessed disruptions to health worker mobility.

We also support the message of recent HWG events emphasising social determinants of public health, such as employment, through an intersectoral approach. Again, ethical health worker recruitment is key to this approach. Global nurse migration is both a workforce and staffing challenge and a public health, global equity, and human rights issue that has a direct impact on the G20's ability to make progress on its overall vision for a just world.

While the HWG discussions are a promising start, what matters now is committing to a clear and decisive course of action.

As the global community grapples with the far-reaching consequences of our global health staffing crisis, November's G20 Summit under Brazil's presidency is a vital opportunity to place this issue at the forefront of the international agenda.

Without bold, collaborative resolutions to curb the depletion of nursing workforces in vulnerable nations, global healthcare access gaps will continue to widen, undermining the G20's stated commitments to improving health equity.

Thus, the global nursing community calls on the G20 leaders to make nurse migration a priority agenda item and commit to the following measures:

- Implement a temporary moratorium on the active recruitment of nurses from acute crisis zones and red list nations which fall below critical workforce density thresholds.
- Strengthen the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, including clear and binding accountability measures.
- Develop fair, meaningful systems for compensating vulnerable nations when recruiting from them, such as an “offsetting” program where destination countries directly fund health systems and nursing education.
- Establish a robust global monitoring and reporting system on international nurse mobility and compliance with ethical recruitment guidelines, using standardised self-sufficiency metrics.
- Prioritise investments in building self-sufficient nursing workforces and health systems that promote greater retention of nurses in their home countries and transition away from unsustainable models that deprive developing nations of the vital healthcare workers they have trained.

The International Council of Nurses stands ready to support the G20 in giving nurse migration its proper place on the agenda.

We urge the G20 leaders to prioritise meaningful solutions for the ethical recruitment and retention of global nursing workforces and, together, move towards building resilient, equitable, and sustainable health systems that leave no country behind.

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