



Message from
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on the occasion of
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The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, and World Health Day this year is dedicated to the same theme.

Nurses and midwives have a crucial role to play in achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals, and ensuring that no one is left behind. We want to highlight their commitment and the hard work they do to make our world healthier, safer and better.

That commitment is clearer than ever at the moment, as the world faces the devastating threat of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Health workers, including nurses and midwives, are working tirelessly day and night to care for patients and save their lives. In fighting COVID-19, they are risking their own health and even their lives. Not only might they become infected with the disease themselves, but they also face distress, fatigue and burnout because of the long hours they work, and some may also face stigma and violence. So it is more important than ever that we pay tribute to nurses, midwives and other health workers, and do everything we can to keep them safe and secure.

The year 2020 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, one of the founders of modern nursing. In our Region, the history of nursing goes back to earlier days; there is a reference to Rufaida Al-Aslamia as the first female Muslim nurse and the first female surgeon in Islam.

Nurses and midwives make up more than half the health workforce in our Region, but we need even more well-educated nurses and midwives within health care teams to effectively address the rise in communicable diseases, manage noncommunicable ailments and promote healthy lifestyles, particularly among women, children and adolescents. To date, progress in strengthening nurses and midwives in our Region has been too slow, despite commitments and continued efforts to address the challenges facing them.

In line with WHO's vision of Health for All by All in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, in October 2019 the 66th session of the Regional Committee, our main governing body in the Region, adopted a resolution calling for action to strengthen nursing and midwifery. I call on our Member States to implement that resolution, accelerate efforts and intensify investment to reduce the alarming shortages of nurses and midwives that we face.

Today, WHO is launching the first-ever *State of the world's nursing* report, which presents up-to-date evidence on the nursing workforce globally; and next year will see the launch of the third *State of the world's midwifery* report, providing updates on progress and future challenges to ensure effective coverage of midwifery services towards the implementation of WHO's global strategy for women's, children's and adolescents' health. Both reports will inform national actions to strengthen the nursing workforce to advance towards UHC and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Every nurse and every midwife has important stories to share, and I say to them: Please tell your stories. Let everyone hear how you are serving people and making the world a better place. Telling people about what you do as a nurse or as a midwife can inspire the young to become nurses and midwives and improve public recognition of these crucial professions.

Today and every day, we acknowledge the work of nurses and midwives globally and in our Region. We show gratitude to them and solidarity with them, and we count on countries to mobilize all the support they deserve.