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UNFPA & WHO joint press release

For the commemoration of World Mental Health Day
“The Great Push: Investing in Mental Health”

H.E. Dr. Nadera Hayat Burhani, Deputy Minister of Public Health, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,

Gerald Gunther Deputy Representative UNFPA

And

Dr Ashfaq Ahmed, Officer in Charge of WHO, Primary Healthcare Program Unit

Kabul 5 October 2011 – Commemorating World Mental Health Day at the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Nadera Hayat Burhani, Deputy Minister of Public Health (MoPH) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with representatives of UNFPA and WHO stressed the importance of investing into Afghanistan's nascent mental health sector.

UNFPA stressed the importance of a coordinated community response where community actors and public institutions cooperate in addressing the needs of gender based violence victims. To this end, UNFPA is implementing number of project targeted on building up the capacity of service providers in order to strengthen the referral path and protection of women and girls – GBV survivors

UNFPA and WHO recognized the investments the MoPH has made into Mental Health Services and called on donors to invest. The MoPH has successfully integrating mental health services as part of the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package Hospital Services (EPHS); and establishing Afghanistan's National Mental Health Strategy for 2009-2014.

WHO is supporting MoPH to continue to set clear guidelines to address its mental health needs. There is evidence of the positive effects local mental health trainers have in educating their district medical services in contemporary mental health standards. WHO and its civil society partners support these standardized training programs but call on donors to help push for an expansion of these services to more provinces.

WHO calls on Afghanistan's health service providers and Ministry of Higher Education to encourage future healthcare students to invest into their mental healthcare knowledge. Afghanistan needs post-graduate training courses of psychiatry, or clinical psychology. Nursing students could consider becoming psychiatric nurses. Afghanistan's health sector has a great need for occupational therapist and social workers. But the public also needs to learn about mental health issues through an awareness campaign to end misconceptions about mental health.

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