MOGADISHU, 11 October 2020- On World Mental Health Day this year, the World Health Organization (WHO) in Somalia urged policy-makers, international and national agencies, and other civil society groups to scale up mental health services in Somalia. This request comes at a time when Somalis are faced with the consequences of the triple threat of COVID-19, flooding and desert locusts, in addition to other regular health and socioeconomic challenges.

According to estimates, one in every three Somalis is affected by a challenge related to their mental health. Unfortunately, however, there are only a few health facilities offering mental health services—for a country of 15 million, there are only 3 psychiatrists and 25 trained nurses dealing with mental health.

“Only when communities have access to good health in a holistic manner, physically and emotionally, can we have a peaceful, progressive and productive society,” said Dr Mamunur Malik, WHO Representative for Somalia. “We all need to join hands to ensure every Somali has access to mental health services, particularly psychosocial support at primary health care level.”

Dr Malik emphasized the inevitable health, economic and social costs that come with dismissing mental health problems. He explained that the burden of coping with diseases such as COVID-19 would only exacerbate the situation and result in more Somalis having to deal with unaddressed anxiety, stress and fear.

Since the first World Mental Health Day, launched 30 years ago, significant efforts have been made around the world to encourage people to talk openly about mental health conditions. In Somalia, there is a need to stop the stigma and discrimination against people suffering from mental health challenges. There is also a need to put an end to violence, and abuses orchestrated against those who are facing mental health problems.

The global theme for this year’s World Mental Health Day is ‘Move for Mental Health: let’s invest.’ In Somalia, in efforts to highlight the importance of ensuring mental health services are accessible by all, and to ensure that this becomes the norm for future generations, the country is commemorating the day with the theme ‘Investing in mental health is investing in Somalia’s future.’

The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator

and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mr Adam Abdelmoula, released a recorded video message on World Mental Health Day, which is being broadcast across the WHO Somalia country office's social media channels. In his message, he called for increasing development assistance from all humanitarian and development partners of Somalia to improve mental health services.

As mental health is fundamental to good health and the well-being of the population, WHO is urging all its partners and donors, including all UN agencies, to urgently scale up their support for mental health in the country and to break the cycle of neglect, lack of awareness, stigma and discrimination, which are often the drivers of poor mental health in any country.

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