



**Statement of the Commissioner for Social Affairs
H.E. Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil**

**On the occasion of
The International Nurses Day**

12 May 2020

Today, the African Union Commission joins the world to commemorate International Nurses Day in support of the invaluable contribution of nurses to the prosperity of health care delivery systems across the globe. At the onset, the Commission pays respect and tribute to all the nursing staff who have lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their care, value and dedication will be honoured through generations.

In addition, the World Health Assembly has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, so in addition to the commemoration, we are also joining the international community to advocate for increased investments in the nursing and midwifery workforce.

Nursing has been a profession with a powerful sense of public service for over 150 years. Over the years, nurses have served the community as providers and collaborators within the primary health care framework. They have also strongly taken up an advocacy role by reaching out to communities for health promotion and calling on decision makers to formulate better health policies. Today, they remain the most vital workforces in healthcare, playing a crucial role in disease prevention, treatment and care. The Commission calls on AU Member States to ensure that all nurses and midwives operate in an environment where they are safe from harm, respected by medical colleagues and community members, have access to a functioning health-care service, and where their work is integrated with other health-care professionals.

Nurses will play an even greater role in delivering quality and timely health care services if they are empowered for leadership. Health systems are challenged now more than ever by COVID-19, and an increase in deadly, lifestyle diseases. There is a great need for nurses who are analytic, critical thinkers and problem solvers to enter the industry. This calls for healthcare specialists who can exude both leadership and innovation. Globally, clinical leadership and engagement is recognised as a fundamental driver for better patient outcomes. The Commission calls for Africa's governments to entrust nurses with leadership positions in the global health sector. In addition, we applaud all the nurses going above and beyond the call of duty to help each other with heavy workloads and save lives as the world battles coronavirus.

The capacity of human resources for health in terms of magnitude and quality has been recognised as a beneficial constituent of strengthening healthcare systems. The World Health Organisation estimates that nurses and midwives represent nearly one-half of the total number of health workers around the world. However, for all countries to reach Sustainable Development Goal Three: *Health and well-being for all*, the world will need an additional nine million nurses and midwives by 2030. These additional jobs represent opportunity for investment in health workers. The International Council for Nurses estimates that the shortage of more than 600,000 nurses in Sub-Saharan Africa needs to be vigorously attended to in order to meet the targets of AU Agenda 2063 and Africa Health Strategy.

Improving the knowledge and skills of the existing nursing and midwifery workforce in Africa is thus a matter of urgency, if the shortage in human resource is to improve. The Commission encourages AU Member States to harness partnerships between universities in Africa to develop programmes that enrich the expertise of nursing and midwifery workforce. Moreover, countries should monitor and evaluate the quality of their nursing schooling system and nursing graduates to ensure that they are fit to meet the demands of an evolving health care system and health-related continental and global goals.

As I conclude, I call on policy makers to recognise that investment in nurses yields robust economies. Since the era of struggling for independence, nurses have played a crucial role in healthcare delivery to the soldiers and communities and despite the terrible conditions during war. This ultimately contributed to attainment of independence and stronger economies, which the continent is reaping from to-date.

On this International Nurses Day, let us remember that nurses are often the first and sometimes the only health professional that people see. They are part of their local community – sharing its culture, strengths and vulnerabilities – and can shape and deliver effective interventions to meet the needs of patients, families and communities. Therefore, we must strive to ensure that nurses across the world are equipped to tackle today's health challenges. By developing nursing and midwifery, countries can achieve the triple impact of improving health, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth. It is time to uplift the critical contribution nurses make to global health.