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Joaquin Alexander Maza Martelli,
President,
United Nations Human Rights Council

Dainius Puras, United Nations Special
Rapporteur
Office of the High Commissioner for
Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

26 September 2017

Dear Mr. Maza Martelli and Mr. Puras,

I am writing on behalf of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA) in response to the report of Mr. Dainius Puras, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (A/HRC/35/21), submitted to the Thirty-fifth session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, 6-23 June 2017. The EPA represents over 80,000 psychiatrists and 42 National Psychiatric Associations. To my knowledge, the World Psychiatric Association and the American Psychiatric Association have already expressed great concern for the Report, and other organisations will do so shortly.

The EPA will provide hereafter general comments and highlights of the most critical aspects of the Report.

General comments

The European Psychiatric Association shares most of the analyses and goals of the "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health". However, the EPA expresses great concern and disappointment for the image of psychiatry and psychiatrists emerging from the document which, in several sections, sounds offensive and discredits mental health services. The biomedical approach is regarded as a source of neglect, abuse and coercion, and as the key factor explaining the current unsatisfactory status of mental health care, while neglecting the main issue, i.e. the still unmet need for parity of esteem between mental and physical health of citizens and the paucity of financial resources allocated to mental health care.

The EPA completely rejects the attempt of the present document to promote a negative image of specialised psychiatric care. Identifying weaknesses and unmet needs is a commendable effort when pursued in the frame of a constructive approach, but not when it undermines the therapeutic alliance between psychiatrists, users and relatives by casting doubts on the image of psychiatry.

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Comments relevant to the most critical aspects of the report

- Psychiatry is presented as a discipline marked by violations of human rights, characterised by a reductionist approach, enslaved to the pharmaceutical industry. Treatment with psychotropic medications is presented as useless if not harmful, ignoring the bulk of evidence on its effectiveness and undermining the efforts of all (mental) health workers and families to avoid treatment discontinuations, still representing the leading cause of relapses and (non-consensual) hospitalisations
- Mental health services are presented as useless. Apparently, the large number of people treated everyday by these services and helped by professionals to live a meaningful life is not worth any mention in the Report.
- Psychiatry is considered as responsible for gender orientation discrimination, while cultural issues favouring discrimination (against many people: women, immigrants, LGBT, etc.) and efforts of psychiatry to fight against discrimination are not even mentioned.
- All long-term care facilities are regarded as incompatible with the respect of human rights and no suggestion is provided on alternatives for people requiring long term housing and assistance, such as elderly people with dementia, if not generic indications of effective psychosocial interventions in the community.
- Public mental health and care for those suffering from mental disorders instead of being promoted as complementary approaches are presented as alternative if not antagonistic approaches. While apparently advocating a holistic approach, which would represent a goal shared by all stakeholders, the document proposes a dangerous dichotomy between biological and psychosocial approaches.

In the light of the potential severe consequences of the diffusion of the present version of the Report of the Special Rapporteur, the EPA advocates a substantial revision of the document and would welcome the opportunity to establish a constructive dialogue and work together for the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for everyone.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Silvana Galderisi', written in a cursive style.

Silvana Galderisi,
EPA President