

The text urges the UN to specify in their document that the term “health” refers to wellbeing and physical and mental health”, so that it will agree with the definition given by the World Health Organization (Organización Mundial de la Salud – OMS) as “ a state of absolute physical, mental and social wellbeing, not only the absence of affection or disease”. Also, the Declaration requests that, among the rights listed by the UN, the right “to the highest level possible of wellbeing and physical and mental health” be included.

The IUPsyP (International Union of Psychological Sciences), which has expressed their support for this Declaration, has urged all its national members and affiliates to work together with their respective Ministries and/or pertinent governmental departments in order to guarantee that mental health and wellbeing be included as an essential part of the objectives for the final proposal the sustainable development Work Group will present this September to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

CONSEJO GENERAL DE COLEGIOS OFICIALES DE PSICÓLOGOS
MADRID, SPAIN

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SYRIAN ASSOCIATION OF MENTAL HEALTH (SAMH)



Above: Dr. Mamoun Mobayed

On the 27-28 September 2012, a group of Syrian mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists and clinical social workers, met in Istanbul, Turkey for a two-day conference entitled: “The psycho-social effects of the Syrian uprising and ways to deal with them”. The aim of this first conference was to address the psychological consequences of the current conflict in Syria, which is now in its fourth year. (1) What motivated these mental health professionals is the human cost of the current conflict in Syria, which has been regarded as a “humanitarian and public health catastrophe” (2). It is estimated that over 200,000 people have been killed, the majority of whom were civilians with a high proportion of women and children (3). Some 1.1 million people were wounded, 45% of them women and children, of whom 10-15% suffered various disabilities including limb amputations.

An estimated 9 million Syrians have fled their homes, taking refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 29 August 2014), more than 3 million have fled to Syria’s immediate neighbors Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Some 6.5 million are internally displaced and almost 100,000 have sought asylum in Europe.

The March 2013 UNICEF Crisis Report, “Syria’s Children: A Lost Generation?” estimated that of 4 million affected people inside Syria, almost 2 million were children and of the 2 million displaced at that time, 800,000 were children. Children have been exposed to grave human rights violations including killing, maiming, sexual violence, torture, arbitrary detention, recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, as well as exposure to explosives.

At the aforementioned Syrian conference there were recommendations, among them to establish a special mental health body dedicated to meet the mental health needs of the Syrians affected by this conflict. The Syrian Association for Mental Health (SAMH) was established and registered as a non-profit organization in the UK, and is currently seeking to be registered in Turkey.

In the introduction of its constitution, SAMH states that the escalating war in Syria has brought with it the significant deterioration of all aspects of life for its citizens, particularly in the area of psychosocial factors. It also noted that there was an acute shortage of organized mental health professionals; these two factors were the catalysts in the formation of the SAMH. SAMH is an independent Syrian association for psychiatrists, psychologists and clinical social workers. (3)

In its vision, SAMH seeks to promote comprehensive psychological health and wellbeing, and to become an established leading scientific association, offering supervised services, consultations, study and research in the field of psychiatry, psychology and clinical social work. (4)

Since its establishment, SAMH was able to hold its second conference early this year (15-16 Feb 2014) in Gaziantep city, south Turkey, close to the borders with Syria. It was a two-day conference with the title of "Psychosocial Consequences of the Syrian Crisis: Towards Comprehensive Mental Health Care". At the Conference many papers, workshops and research works were presented. Five days of training workshops were organized before and after the conference for some 35 young Syrian mental health trainee professionals from inside Syria and the refugee camps. Some of the recommendations of the conference include:

- To develop a strategy to cover the mental health needs of displaced Syrians
- To continue to offer support and supervision to teams on the ground
- To work alongside and coordinate efforts with other humanitarian and support agencies working in the area
- To establish links with other international bodies interested in helping displaced Syrians
- To offer advice and help to facilitate their efforts.

Many members of SAMH have been working on various psychiatric and psychosocial programs inside Syria and the neighboring countries, especially in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

SAMH has now established formal contact with many organizations including the WHO, UNHCR, Royal College of Psychiatrists UK, IDRAAC, Arab Federation of Psychiatrists, World Psychiatric Association, British Arab Psychiatric Association, and Jordanian Psychiatric Association. SAMH is now a Voting Member of the World Federation for Mental Health.

SAMH will soon call for people and organizations to participate in its third conference in April 2015.

SAMH is run by an administrative board of nine members who were elected during the first meeting of the general assembly in February 2014. The elected President of SAMH is Dr Mohammad Al-Jundi, a Consultant in Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine.

SAMH works with six sub-committees; Field Services, Training, International Relations, Study and Research, Media and Legal.

References

¹ Interview with Dr Nadim Almoshmash, Consultant Psychiatrist: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/usefulresources/rcpsychenewsletters/enewsletters2014/may2014/syriancrisis.aspx>

² Abou-Saleh, M and Mobayed, M (2013) Mental Health in Post-conflict Syria; *International Psychiatry*, 10:58-60.

³ The Syrian network for Human Rights (2014), www.sn4hr.org

⁴ <http://www.syriasamh.com>

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