

**Speech by
UNDP Special Representative of the Administrator
Mr. Frode Mauring**

**Mental Health Conference - Ramallah
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Deputy Minister of Health Dr. Masri,
Consul General of France Mr. Desagneaux,
Doctors,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you this morning at the opening of this conference in Ramallah to present the current status of mental health services, the achievements of the AFD/UNDP project and the future of mental health in the occupied Palestinian territory.

More often than not, mental health is not given the priority it deserves. It is not always recognizable or appropriately diagnosed and does not present clear physical symptoms.

Mental health is treated with suspicion and indifference. That is the case here as it is anywhere else in the world.

There is clear evidence that mental illness, being an illness in its own right, can lead to other social and health problems. It has a major impact on family life and work. An illness that is underdiagnosed, frequently leads to stigma and has huge secondary consequences in the society at large has to be a major public health concern.

While mental illness can occur anywhere in the world, external factors have an impact. Living in conflict, under occupation, with limited freedom of movement and economic hardship can make matters worse.

Many Palestinian children have acute levels of post-traumatic stress disorders due to Israeli military incursions and settlers' violence, as is the case in Gaza and Hebron. In fact this can be scientifically measured. While one out of 20 in a normal society suffers signs of PTSD, a study of Palestinian children reveals that it is as high as one out of three, even one out of two of children affected directly by military incursions. Needless to say, this means that the need for mental health facilities is even higher in oPt than in a place less affected by conflict.

This very complexity is discouraging to take action, and an easy excuse for leaving many facets of this pressing issue overlooked or misunderstood.

But we have to act and take a closer look at three particular areas:

- The need for increased research and human resources in the area of mental health;

- How to coordinate practices in the field; and
- How best to increase education and awareness of mental health issues

With generous support from the French – and close collaboration with the Ministry of Health - UNDP has implemented a USD3.9 million project to improve mental health care throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. The initiative – comprised of both physical infrastructure and equipment as well as technical assistance and capacity development, including the following components:

- The construction of three community mental health centres in Jenin, Nablus and Halhul
- A Documentation Centre in Ramallah as well as the
- Recruitment and training of mental health professionals, and
- Developing the capacities of primary health care practitioners to identify mental health conditions

The four centres are now fully functional and have been handed over to the Ministry of Health.

It is specially worth mentioning that the Community Mental Health Centre in Halhul (Hebron) is the first of its kind in the occupied Palestinian territory completely dedicated to children and adolescents.

During 2010, the number of cases treated at this Centre increased from 53 to 285. This reflects the enormous demand for mental health services and the good reception of the centre by the community.

These clinics have not only contributed to the treating of mental illness but to the recognition of it, which will in turn allow patients to receive the treatment they need to allow them and their families to quickly return to normal life.

I am pleased to introduce today the excellent results of the first phase of this model project.

There are many challenges ahead. I do not have all the answers. That is why I have to rely on you and our partners for advice and next steps. We believe that concerted efforts remain necessary and we must try to find ways for continuous support in this field.

I would like to thank Agence Francais de Développement (AFD), who has been working with the Palestinian Authority on mental health care since 1995.

In addition, I would like to thank the Deputy Minister of health and everyone else who has made this conference possible. You have helped put mental health on the public policy agenda.

Thank you and I wish you success in your deliberations and ways forward. UNDP/PAPP stands ready and continues to be a partner in this exercise.