

## **Statement of APRO Regional Director, Mr. Bjorn Andersson on the occasion of the delivery of 1,000 O2 concentrators to the State Welfare Organization**

On behalf of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it is my pleasure to offer my best wishes and support on the occasion of the handing over ceremony organized for the delivery of oxygen concentrators to our long standing partner in the Islamic Republic of Iran-the State Welfare Organization-and for the benefit of older Iranians. At the same time, I would like to congratulate the State Welfare Organization for marking down the week of 17 July as the week of Welfare, aimed to raise awareness on the health and welfare of the most vulnerable populations in Iran.

More than two years have passed since I last visited Iran in October 2018 to attend the Tehran HelpAge Regional Forum on Ageing. I took part in fruitful exchanges on the theme of families, communities and states in ageing societies, stressing on the life cycle approach and the feminization of ageing.

Since then, the country has made significant progress in advancing healthy and active ageing in the country, culminating so far in the approval of the National Document for Older Persons aimed at improving social support and health services, and promoting age-friendly environments, policies, and services.

At the same time, the world has been faced with an unprecedented crisis- the COVID-19 pandemic-with devastating consequences on the health and well-being of the entire population.

There is no doubt that older persons have been adversely affected.

Global data has shown that older persons living in long-term care facilities and rehabilitation centers in particular have been most vulnerable to infection and adverse outcomes from COVID-19.

To date, the Islamic Republic of Iran has reported over 3.3 million laboratory confirmed cases and over 85 thousand deaths. Out of these, approximately 63,000 older persons over 65 years have lost their lives to COVID-19. In addition, a total of nearly 13,000 of elderly are residing in approximately 300 long-term care facilities and are at continued risk of infection. Priority vaccination has been given to older persons in residential care centers.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, UNFPA and partners have been successful at redirecting their efforts to respond to the needs of vulnerable populations. With the State Welfare Organization, UNFPA has forged a partnership with UNICEF and the European Union Humanitarian Aid -ECHO, to protect the lives of over 13,800 older

persons residing in care facilities by providing oxygen concentrators, and by promoting infection prevention and control through risk communication and community engagement.

The procurement of 1,000 oxygen concentrators is proof of the commitment and dedication of UNFPA and partners to leave no one behind during the pandemic, and support national efforts. Once again, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with all its initiatives has demonstrated to be a leading example in addressing the needs of older people in the region. At this hour of need, UNFPA continues to stand by the people of Iran and in the nation's pursuit for sustainable development.