



Clubhouse International

Creating Community: Changing the World of Mental Health

"I congratulate you all in Clubhouse International on the impressive work done around our world to improve and better the lives and opportunities of so many."

Clubhouse International World Seminar 2019

Remarks by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and Director-General Emeritus of the World Health Organization, upon receiving the first-ever Rudyard n. Propst Award conferred by Clubhouse International in recognition of individuals who make extraordinary contributions to improving the lives of people with mental illness.

My relationship with this impressive organization goes far back more than a quarter century when I chose personally to support the activities of Fountain House in Oslo, our capital. As I left the premiership and went on to Geneva to lead the WHO, I soon detected the large gaps in addressing global mental health and decided to considerably increase our efforts, preparing also for a world health report solely focused on the mental health agenda.

Yesterday evening I returned from New York and Washington having addressed a summit with the General Assembly of the UN on a critical part of the SD Goals: the need for universal health coverage. On the panel with me was the SG, the DG of WHO and the president of The World Bank. Health for all, primary health care and universal coverage certainly integrates both prevention and the needs and rights for all with a mental health challenge.

We have known for decades now that the global burden of diseases does illustrate how the investment in and attention to mental disorders has been far behind. This is alarmingly disproportionate to the burden of mental health conditions in all countries. Action plans have been launched, also by WHO, that widen the scope of action and attention much more broadly to the community level, an aspect that only more clearly illustrates the importance of the principles and experiences of the clubhouse model itself.

In New York, I represented the "Elders", and organization initiated by Nelson Mandela in 2007. We were tasked, as independent former leaders, to work for peace, justice and human rights. To our agenda we have recently added "Access to Justice", in addition to climate, sustainable development and the nuclear threat itself. Questions of human rights of access to health, access to justice is indeed highly relevant in the whole area of mental health and to counter the sizable global burden of mental illness.

I congratulate you all in Clubhouse International on the impressive work done around our world to improve and better the lives and opportunities of so many. You have shown that concern, empathy, support and re-establishing hope in individuals can make a major difference in a more inclusive society.

This legacy is also the reason why I pushed hard as a juror some years ago to make Fountain House and Clubhouse International succeed in the hard competition to be awarded the Hilton Humanitarian Prize. I knew then and I know that that was the right decision.