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SNF Nostos 2023 Conference

MENTAL HEALTH

Opening remarks

Andreas C. Dracopoulos
SNF Co-President

Distinguished friends,

Welcome to SNF Nostos 2023, our 12th get-together, our 12th conference.

Thank you all for joining us, in person or online. Your presence and participation are much appreciated.

First of all, I wanted to say that our thoughts are with those who lost their lives last week in the horrible capsized refugee boat accident near Pylos, and their families.

We are the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF). We are an international private philanthropic organization, and we have been around for 27 years and active in more than 130 countries around the world.

The conference is taking place at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC), which is our largest single grant to date and was designed by a great architect and friend: Renzo Piano. We fully funded it and fully delivered it as a gift to the Greek state, to the people of Greece, in 2017; we continue to support it; and we are happy to be back for SNF Nostos 2023.

We do not have any policy agenda; we just partner up with our grantees in a collective and collaborative effort to contribute and try to make this a better world for all.

We have touched on different topics across the last decade-plus in these annual SNF conferences. Last year the topic was health at large and this year we have zoomed in on mental health. This follows our current focus on our ongoing Global Health Initiative (GHI), currently under implementation on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mental health: COVID, for all practical purposes, is over, but we do still hear many stories of long COVID. I am not sure how prevalent this is physiologically, but I do believe that long COVID will prove relevant more in terms of how it continues to affect our mental health in the years to come. The two most used defenses against COVID were wearing a mask (which physically covers our noses and mouths, affecting the way we were built to breathe) and avoiding being with other people, thus affecting our core of our humanity itself. Then you add the numerous disruptions COVID has caused across so many other areas of how we live, who we are, etc. But if there is one good thing that may have come out of COVID, it's that it really seems that the stigma of mental health challenges has finally worn off. As we all know, to solve a problem, one has to be fully aware of it to start with. And here we are! We can finally speak about mental health and work together, across disciplines, to find solutions. Then again, we must be respectful and fully aware that this is only the beginning. There is a lot of work in front of us if we are to make improvements across the board and 'liberate' lives.

SNF Nostos 2023 hopefully provides a platform for experts from different disciplines and various parts of the world to share their thoughts, their findings, their experiences, to connect the dots in a collective spirit. This will be with us for many years to come, and there is a lot of work to be done. So, thank you all for being here and taking part in our gathering.

As I mentioned above, our own involvement is passive in terms of providing financial support and collaborating with our grantee partners to make sure there is as much positive impact for

social good as possible. As such and within the framework of the Global Health Initiative (GHI) we have undertaken, we are very proud of our collaborations with amazing organizations (and of course the people behind them, as it's always the people who make the difference—we never forget that) such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative in Greece and the SNF Global Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health at the Child Mind Institute in New York, the SNF Center for Precision Psychiatry and Mental Health at Columbia University in New York, The Rockefeller University and its newly established SNF Institute for Global Infectious Disease Research in New York, the Pediatric Cancer Center and the Unicas Center for Rare Pediatric Diseases at the Hospital Sant Joan de Déu in Barcelona, Yorkshire Cancer Research in the United Kingdom, the King Hussein Cancer Foundation and Center for pediatric oncology in Jordan, the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, the ETH Zurich Foundation in Switzerland, the National Children's Alliance in the US, and others. We are grateful to have the opportunity to partner with all these organizations as part of our common vision and mission for strengthening quality, access, and equity in health care at large! The core focus of our GHI is in Greece with a multifaceted approach involving the construction of three new hospitals (in Thessaloniki, Komotini, Sparta) designed by the same great architect and friend Renzo Piano and his team in Italy—we recently had to cancel the tender due to skyrocketing bids, but I am happy to say that we have recently re-engaged, and we are hopeful that very soon we will be in the position to announce going ahead with the construction contracts for all three hospitals—and numerous projects involving educational and training programs (on trauma, nursing, infection prevention, etc.), medical and technological equipment and new helicopter and aircraft procurement, supporting grants in other hospitals such as Evangelismos and Attikon hospitals, etc.

But the focus today and tomorrow is on mental health per se; again, we are grateful to our grantee partners and many other experts who have joined us from around the world to share their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences on how we can improve the mental health landscape at large for the benefit of all humanity.

The arts: we fully value the importance of the arts at large and art's positive effect on peoples' lives; I am happy to see the 'A' back in STEM education—it is now back to STEAM as it should be. The arts in general can have a very healing effect on peoples' moods and mental health overall. This year, we teamed up with Release Athens Festival, one of the premier music festivals in Greece, to offer to our visitors and the public at large three days (the last couple of nights and also tomorrow Friday) of two-stage concerts: at the SNFCC Great Lawn and at Plateia Nerou a few minutes' walk from here. To celebrate our new partnership, we will be announcing soon €500,000 worth of additional grants in the mental health space in the name of SNF-Release Athens.

SNF Nostos Pop-up Radio: like last year, we are very happy that we have our own Nostos radio voice, a beautiful collaborative spirit between Radio Workshop (formerly the Children's Radio Foundation) coming from Africa and Radio Panteion of Panteion University of Athens. It is the voice of the young that will cover the conference with their thoughts and music.

Each annual SNF Nostos Conference takes a lot of work. More than we can even imagine. Work for the next annual conference starts the day after the current one ends. I would like to thank every single person who has directly or indirectly contributed to what we all see here today as SNF Nostos 2023. There are many people, many colleagues from SNF, and

our sister organizations iMEDD, Regeneration & Progress, Field of Life, and Vamvakou Revival, who have worked tirelessly to make sure the end product can be the best possible. I just wanted to highlight three individuals whom all you active conference participants and visitors from abroad have gotten to know quite well and without whom there would be no SNF Nostos 2023: Thanassi, Dimitri, and Lenia, please stand up.

It is of course a great honor that the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, will be joining us for a live discussion later today. Afterwards, we hope you all enjoy the run events and the party in the evening at the Agora.

Youth: We believe in our youth, and we try to embrace them and engage them in every possible way. These are all issues that affect them, and they should have a say; they should take ownership, together with the necessary responsibility that comes with ownership. They have a lot to learn from us, our experiences, and we certainly have a lot to learn from them. Last year we formed the SNF Nostos Youth Advisory Committee who have been collaborating with us every step of the way as we organized our conference throughout the last few months. We started last year with six young members and this year there are eleven members, a full team, from 16-25 years old, representing various parts of the world, from Africa, from Peru to Hong Kong, India, etc. So, I would like you please to join me in welcoming these bright young participants.

[Joy Fan, Giannis Vassilopoulos, Thibeaux Hirsh, Beatrice Nyamwenge Okech, Gerald Mballe, Mary-Ann Nobele, Camila Huidobro, Constantine Dracopoulos, Rusha Chatterjee, Yiming Bai, and Maria Andrikopoulou introduce themselves.]