9 October 2012 | Geneva – On **World Mental Health Day** (10 October), the World Health Organization is calling for an end to the
stigmatization
of
depression
and other
mental
disorders
and for better access to treatment for all people who need it.

Globally, more than 350 million people have depression, a mental disorder that prevents people from functioning well. But because of the stigma that is often still attached to depression, many fail to acknowledge that they are ill and do not seek treatment.

Depression is different from usual mood fluctuations. Depression induces a sustained feeling of sadness for two weeks or more and interferes with the ability to function at work, school or home. Effective treatments include psycho-social treatment and medication. The active involvement of depressed people and those who are close to them in addressing depression is key. The first step is to recognize the depression and reach out for support. The earlier the treatment begins, the more effective it is.

“We have some highly effective treatments for depression. Unfortunately, fewer than half of the people who have depression receive the care they need. In fact in many countries this is less than ten percent,” says Dr Shekhar Saxena, Director of the Department for Mental Health and Substance Abuse. “This is why WHO is supporting countries in fighting stigma as a key activity to increasing access to treatment.”

Cultural attitudes and lack of proper understanding of the condition contribute to a reluctance to seek help for depression.

WHO estimates suggest that depression is common in all regions of the world. A recent study supported by WHO revealed that around 5 percent of people in the community had depression during the last year.

Depression results from a complex interaction of social, psychological and biological factors. There is a relationship between depression and physical health, for example cardiovascular disease can lead to depression and vice versa. Up to one in five women who give birth experience post-partum depression.

In addition, circumstances such as economic pressures, unemployment, disasters, and conflict can also increase the risk of the disorder.

At its worst, depression can lead to suicide. Tragically almost one million people commit suicide every year and a large proportion of them experience depression.

WHO assists governments in including treatment of depression in their basic health care packages. Through WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), health workers in low-income countries are trained to recognize mental disorders and provide proper care, psycho-social assistance and medication to people with depression.

World Mental Health Day was initiated by the World Federation for Mental Health in 1992. The day is used by many countries and organizations to raise public awareness about mental health issues and to promote open discussion of mental disorders, and investments in prevention, promotion and treatment services.