**The mental health of the population is a challenge not only for the health sector but for national security as well**

 **Bratislava, 30 May 2023: Given the security risks associated with the consequences of long-term and unsystematic solutions to mental health issues, GLOBSEC took the initiative to include this topic in its largest security conference, the 2023 Bratislava Forum and has invited respected experts from major international and national organisations to work together and find solutions.**

The global pandemic and the war in Ukraine, with its consequences for the region, have exposed the vulnerability and unpreparedness of health systems. Answers on how to make better use of data systems and analytical tools and on how to move from a reactive to a preventive approach in health care will be sought by Francesca Colombo, an expert from the OECD, and also by Jozef Shuvada, WHO executive board member.

Ukraine will also be a key topic of this year's GLOBSEC Forum. Therefore, the fatal consequences of the war on mental health will be discussed with top experts who have long advocated that Ukraine's recovery is not possible without the consistent implementation of systems and strategies leading to averting or reducing the catastrophic consequences on the population's mental health.

"I am very grateful for GLOBSEC's decision to include mental health among the main topics. It is a strong signal and reflects the recognition of what 'global security' and 'health' means in 2023. The most basic concept of security involves ensuring that health is not compromised. This applies on a personal, national, and global level," said Thomas Tighe, CEO of Direct Relief. He stressed that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the deliberate harm to civilians, is a blatant and traditional breach of security.

Steve Appleton, CEO and President of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL), which brings together many countries in the mental health field, also stressed the importance of this topic at GLOBSEC. "Mental health is a global issue that affects all of society. A healthy society can only be achieved by acknowledging this and including mental health in all policies. This is the basis for improving equality and eliminating stigma and discrimination. Facilitating this discussion between political and civic leaders is important to increase understanding, cooperation, improved conditions and quality of life."

"In times of economic and political uncertainty, IIMHL's greatest challenge is to ensure that mental health is viewed holistically. To do this, we need effective partnerships, the sharing of necessary information and data among mental health leaders, and the building of a network to share and implement effective programs."

GLOBSEC brings the topic of mental health and the importance of raising awareness also among senior political leaders thanks to its collaboration with the League for Mental Health.

Andrej Vršanský, Director of the Mental Health League of Slovakia: "Most of the Slovak population perceives mental health as an intimate matter for individuals and as an innovation if a person seeks help or uses a service. However, mental health is a much broader concept, which has been vividly visualised in the crises that manifested themselves both during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. International organisations bringing together the best know-how see mental health as a concept and a tool for restoring and improving the quality of society as a whole. MHE, IIMHL, WHO, UNICEF and other renowned organisations have long ago clearly outlined where to focus their attention and how. We are proud to have placed mental health in this context in the context of security in Europe at GLOBSEC."

"The Mental Health League SR has been working for systemic change for a long time. We want to make clear recommendations on where the reform of the mental health care system can be directed, how it will be initially financed and what kind of state support will be needed for this significant change, for which Slovakia has been waiting for 20 years. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. Our partners can answer questions we cannot solve ourselves because they have long tried solutions that look intuitively right but do not work in practice. We greatly appreciate their support, and I believe that the Slovak government will also take advantage of it," adds A. Vršanský.