23 October 2017, Bethlehem – Minister of Health Dr Jawad Awad joined representatives from the World Health Organization and European Union to celebrate World Mental Health Day in Bethlehem Psychiatric Hospital. The hospital hosted a bazaar displaying handmade crafts, candles and embroidery prepared by the hospital's service users. The event was attended by approximately 200 participants from civil society, the Palestinian Ministry of Health, UN agencies, local institutes and universities. World Mental Health Day is observed in October every year, to raise awareness of mental health issues and mobilize efforts to improve mental health.

Dr Awad said: "This hospital is the first psychiatric hospital in the Middle East. It is the only hospital in Palestine that provides practical training for mental health students and occupational therapy for mental health service users. The Ministry of Health is celebrating World Mental Health Day to demonstrate our commitment to integrating mental health in all health facilities. We are also committed to adopting occupational therapy for mental health service users to assure their integration in society."

A celebration also took place last week in Gaza, with a football tournament to raise awareness about mental health issues. The two events are part of an ongoing project funded by the EU *Building Palestinian resilience: improving psychosocial and mental health responses to emergency situations*
. This project addresses important gaps in the development of mental health services in Palestine, particularly in relation to mental health emergency response in Gaza, and seeks to build the capacity of health institutions to detect and respond to mental health needs.