

**In the headlines:**

- UN agency's mobile reproductive health teams reach women in besieged area of Aleppo
- UN aid wing sounds alarm on behalf of civilians caught up in rising violence in northern Syria
- Haiti: New UN mission to take innovative approach to strengthening rule of law
- Amid wave of protests in Iran, UN rights chief urges impartial probe into all acts of violence

**UN agency's mobile reproductive health teams reach women in besieged area of Aleppo**

UNFPA and Syrian Arab Red Cross arrived in Sheikh Maqsoud in December, the first time a UN agency has entered the area with aid.  
Photo: UNFPA Syria

**3 January** – The United Nations reproductive rights agency has reached the Sheikh Maqsoud area of Aleppo, where thousands of women have been cut off from medical care for years.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said its mobile reproductive teams reached the area on 30 December, providing family planning services, and antenatal and postpartum care to more than 80 women.

“Conflict typically puts these women and their babies at risk. Physical hardship and emotional trauma often complicate delivery,” said Massimo Diana, UNFPA’s Representative in Syria. “Health services are deteriorated after the seven years of crisis in Syria, in addition to the limited supplies and high patient loads.”

One health facility is operational in Sheikh Maqsoud, serving an estimated 50 patients per day. According to UNFPA that is “not sufficient to meet local needs, where about 3,000 women are estimated to be pregnant.”

The UN agency said the existing health facility is poorly equipped, with no capacity to perform Caesarean section operations or other major surgeries. There is no ambulance available to transfer critical cases to hospitals outside the area.

Humanitarian responders also noted that most roads are in disrepair and choked with mud, limiting access. The area also lacks an operating electrical system, forcing the community to rely on generators and expensive fuel, when available.

In addition to lacking quality reproductive health care, humanitarian workers observed a large number of people living with disabilities, including wheelchair users, as well as families in desperate need of warm clothing for the winter.



## Haiti: New UN mission to take innovative approach to strengthening rule of law

**3 January** – The head of the new United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, known as MINUJUSTH, has said the operation will carry out its work in an innovative in the island nation – complete with an unusually tight timeframe and a bench-marking exit strategy.

Describing what is unique about the mission, the Special Representative and Head of MINUJUSTH, Susan Page, underscored that it focusses “exclusively on the rule of law.”

“The new mandate by the [UN] Security Council is to work with the Government of Haiti to strengthen its rule of law intuitions. It's also to continue to support the HNP, the Haitian National Police, and to work on justice and human rights – and that includes human rights reporting, monitoring and analysis,” she told *UN News*.

MINUJUSTH is also unique in that its mandate calls for a benchmarking exit strategy.

“Within two years, we can figure out how we [will exit the country] but with benchmarks for progress that can be measured,” she stressed.

The mission head stated that the country team created a framework with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which, along with SDG 16 – to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies – is working in conjunction with the Haitian Government.

“This is a way of bringing the entire country team together, along with the peacekeeping mission, to attain those goals,” she continued, adding that the Government “has already signed up to be a partner in trying to accomplish this for its own development.”

### Mobile team approach

Ms. Page explained that while MINUJUSTH is almost exclusively based in the capital, Port-au-Prince, it will also have a 'mobile approach' that will take teams into the field – reaching the greatest number of people.

The mission chief told *UN News* that the teams will focus on peace, justice and rule of law, to help the people figure out their needs, and then connect them with top-level political figures to see how the UN can help the Government address those needs.

“Once they have a baseline of what the people are looking for, what they need knowledge about, we hope that this bottom-up and top-down approach will help Haiti to strengthen its own institutions with a bit of push from us,” she explained.

Ms. Page sees this new approach as a possible new peacekeeping model, commenting that with the aim of doing more with less, “one of the ways we can reach people is by being more flexible and being more mobile.”

### On the ground

Turning to the situation on the ground, Ms. Page noted that while Haiti's political system had been less than stable, “now, all of that is settled.”

“Now that Haiti has its elected officials at all levels, including at the lowest levels in the communes, we have something to



The UN flag is raised at the opening ceremony for the new United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). Photo: Logan Abassi/MINUJUSTH

work with,” she said.

“The police will continue to work with the Haitian National Police on their strategic development plan, but they also have a programme that is strengthening the mid-level to upper level cadres of the National Police,” she added

As for the ongoing combat against cholera in the country, Ms. Page expressed hope to get to zero transmission.

“One of the ways we continue to work is through the country team,” she said, mentioning the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which are working to strengthen sanitation and water systems.

“It's really a whole of UN approach; and with the Government's strategic vision and roadmap of how they intend to get there. And we can help them with that,” she said reassuringly.

## UN aid wing sounds alarm on behalf of civilians caught up in rising violence in northern Syria



Boys pass rubble and destroyed buildings on their way to a nearby private school offering basic lessons, in the city of Maarat al-Numaan, Idlib Governorate. Photo: UNICEF/Giovanni Diffidenti

**3 January** – The United Nations humanitarian wing and its partners in Syria on Wednesday expressed deep concern about the protection and wellbeing of tens of thousands of civilians in north-eastern Hama and southern Idlib governorates, following increased hostilities, which have reportedly resulted in scores of deaths and injuries and displacement in the area.

According to a UN spokesperson, yesterday, seven people were reportedly killed and at least 18 people injured after an airstrike hit the Khan Elsobol town in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, 25 people were reportedly injured and several shops and facilities were damaged when shelling hit the main vegetable market in Jisr-Ash-Shugur city in western rural Idlib.

“Further airstrikes and shelling incidents were reported in the southern countryside of the governorate,” UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq

told reporters at the daily briefing in New York.

He said that the UN and its partners are coordinating the humanitarian response in the area through cross-border operations from Turkey. Priority needs include shelter, food, medical supplies, water and sanitation and other humanitarian assistance.

“The United Nations reminds all parties to the conflict of the legal obligation to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects,” stated Mr. Haq.

He went on to say the UN is extremely concerned over a recent string of attacks on healthcare facilities inside Syria. On 31 December, a local hospital in the Idlib Governorate was reportedly damaged by an airstrike, while one day earlier a medical warehouse belonging to an international non-governmental organization was reportedly damaged by barrel bombs.

“We continue to call on all the parties to the conflict to end the destruction of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure that is essential for the civilian population, and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law,” emphasized the Deputy Spokesman.

## Amid wave of protests in Iran, UN rights chief urges impartial probe into all acts of violence



High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

**3 January** – The top United Nations human rights official on Wednesday urged the Iranian authorities to handle the protests that have taken place around the country “with great care” so as not to further inflame violence and unrest.

“I am deeply disturbed by reports that more than 20 people, including an 11-year-old boy, have died and hundreds have been arrested during the recent wave of protests in Iran,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, in a separate statement that urged the authorities to investigate all deaths and serious injuries that have occurred so far.

He said the Iranian authorities must respect the rights of all demonstrators and detainees, including their right to life, and guarantee their safety and security. Calling for thorough, independent and impartial investigations of all acts of violence that have taken place, the UN rights chief said there must be a concerted effort by the authorities “to ensure that all security forces respond in a manner that is proportionate and strictly necessary, and fully in line with international law.”

Mr. Zeid stressed that Iranian citizens who take to the streets to express their discontent have a right to be heard, and that the issues they raise should be resolved through dialogue, with full respect for freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly.

“It is incumbent on the authorities that their actions do not provoke a downward spiral of violence, as occurred in 2009,” he warned. “The authorities must take all steps to ensure that this does not happen again.”

The High Commissioner urged the authorities to release from detention any protestors who have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, or penalized in any way, for expressing their views and protesting in a peaceful manner. “Peaceful protests must not be criminalized,” he said. “They are a legitimate part of the democratic process.”

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Wednesday deplored the loss of life in the wave of protests in Iran and said that further violence must be avoided.

A statement issued by a UN spokesperson said the Secretary-General is following with concern recent developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“He urges respect for the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and that any demonstrations take place in a peaceful manner. Further violence must be avoided,” the statement said.