

[UN rights team heading to Venezuela may pave way for official mission led by Bachelet](#)

A United Nations human rights team is to begin an official visit to Venezuela on Monday at the invitation of the Government, potentially paving the way for an official mission to Caracas by the UN's top rights official, [Michelle Bachelet](#).

Five staff members are to tour the country from 11 to 22 March, her office, [OHCHR](#), said on Friday, amid a [protracted crisis](#), arising from a faltering economy, political instability, and violent anti-Government demonstrations.

The announcement follows an initial invitation last November from President Nicolas Maduro to High Commissioner Bachelet, which was reiterated by Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza at the current [Human Rights Council](#) session in Geneva.

"During its visit, the team will seek to meet with Government officials, representatives of the National Assembly, civil society organisations and victims of human rights violations," OHCHR said in a statement. "The team will visit Caracas, as well as other cities in a number of states in Venezuela."

'Standard practice' ahead of High Commissioner visit

The High Commissioner's office added that it is "standard practice" for a technical team to be deployed ahead of a "possible" visit by her.

This is to ensure that Ms. Bachelet would have "unfettered access to the people and places she would need to visit, to be able to gain a clear understanding of the human rights situation in the country", OHCHR's statement explained.

UNHCR centre opens in Colombia for vulnerable Venezuelans

In another development, the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), announced on Friday that it has opened a reception centre in Colombia for the most vulnerable Venezuelans crossing the border.

Thousands of Venezuela nationals are still leaving the country every day and UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic said that many of them have resorted to living on the streets in neighbouring Colombia.

The new facility in the border city of Maicao, in La Guajira region, has space for 350 people, with room for expansion if necessary, the UNHCR official explained.

"A significant number of Venezuelans in Maicao are living on the streets or

in informal settlements and 81 per cent of those interviewed, said that they required shelter," Mr. Mahecic said.

Colombia's generosity praised but reception capacity 'overwhelmed'

Colombia now hosts more than one million Venezuelans, who despite the authorities' generosity and open-border policy, have overwhelming humanitarian needs, according to UNHCR.

"Over 3.4 million Venezuelans are living abroad, of whom 2.7 million have left the country since 2015," Mr. Mahecic said. "Colombia is the country that is most affected by the outflow, with over 1.1 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants."

To help them, the new centre will provide shelter, food, water, basic medical care, and other services in the centre, on a short-term basis.

"It's a reception centre which will basically serve to provide immediate support to the most vulnerable categories" Mr. Mahecic said. "That may involve unaccompanied children, children who may have been separated from their families, vulnerable women, people who have disabilities, and so on. It is not meant to provide a permanent shelter on a long-term basis."

'5,000 people leave Venezuela every day'

This year, the UN agency is appealing for more than \$730 million to help more than nearly three million Venezuelans and host communities in 16 countries.

"On average, we still see that about 5,000 people cross into the neighbouring countries, and from those neighbouring countries then proceed into other nations in the region," Mr. Mahecic said. "Those numbers obviously fluctuate, but this is the average that we have been seeing for quite some time."

To complement Colombia's efforts to provide international protection to those arriving at the border, UNHCR continues to scale up shelter, legal advice and access to basic services for people in "dire" need.