



# SAMS

MONTHLY

# NEWSLETTER

Vol 2 | June 2025



*A New Dawn for Syria*

SAMS Enters a New Chapter  
of Recovery and Rebuilding



# CURRENT PROJECTS

## Syria

**A**s thousands of families across Syria are facing displacement and difficulties in aid delivery, SAMS is stepping up with an unwavering commitment to deliver life-saving care and restore dignity to those in need.

We are pleased to share the release of our latest **Syria Flash Update**, providing a detailed look into the most urgent health needs and how SAMS is responding with expanded operations, medical missions, and life-saving care across the country.



Several hospitals in Idlib and Aleppo face imminent closure by July 2025 without emergency funding. Despite funding shortfalls and continued hostilities, SAMS is scaling up its in-country operations with a new national office in Damascus and four regional hubs to ensure efficient service delivery.

### Key Highlights



20 dialysis machines and critical medicines to the most underserved areas.



Delivering emergency fuel, dispatching medical teams, and ensuring hospitals could continue to care for the injured in Tartous and Latakia.



Enhanced Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) program, offering safe spaces, trained psychologists, and community outreach to help young people cope with anxiety, fear, and loss



Over 900 medical professionals received hands-on training and education



Hosted two powerful scientific conferences in Idlib and Aleppo, bringing together 300+ healthcare workers to learn, collaborate, and renew their commitment to healing Syria.

**Read SAMS' latest Syria Flash Update at [sams-usa.net/reports](https://sams-usa.net/reports)**





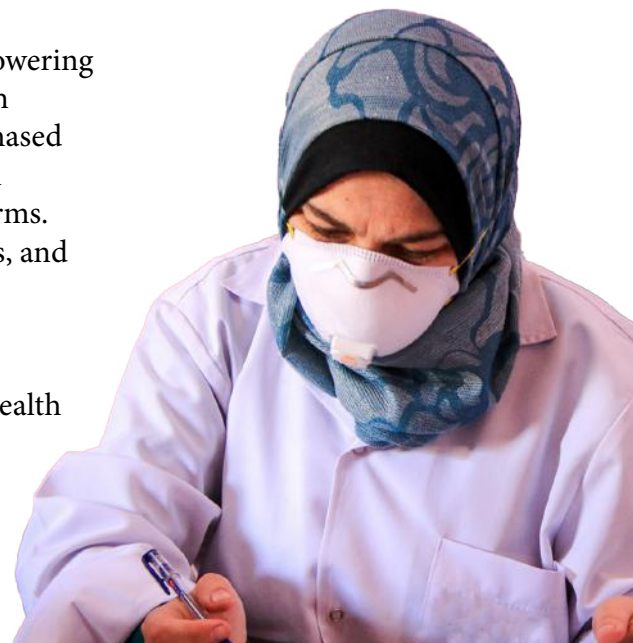
# Key Insights from our Syria Situation Report: Syria's Health Sector

SAMS' Situation Report assesses Syria's health sector after the December 2024 collapse of the Assad regime. Based on workshops with over 300 health professionals across Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, and Damascus, it highlights critical challenges and priorities aligned with WHO's six health system pillars. The sector faces fragmentation, chronic underfunding, political interference, workforce shortages, and supply chain collapse. Regional disparities and sanctions worsen medicine and equipment shortages, while corruption undermines care.

Despite this, the report offers a clear recovery roadmap focused on decentralization, transparency, and sustainability. It recommends empowering local health authorities, creating inclusive coordination, unifying health information systems, and revitalizing education and partnerships. A phased reform approach combines urgent actions like supply stabilization with long-term strategies including national health insurance and legal reforms. Collaboration among the transitional government, international bodies, and civil society is essential.

A complementary community study enriches understanding of public experiences. Overall, the report presents a blueprint to rebuild Syria's health system as a resilient foundation for national recovery.

Read SAMS' Syria Situation Report  
at [sams-usa.net/reports](https://sams-usa.net/reports)



## Recognizing Our Heroic Nurses

SAMS marked **International Nurses Day on May 12** by honoring the unwavering dedication of the heroic nurses who stayed up through long nights, sacrificing their time and comfort to care for communities in their darkest hours. Harsh conditions never deterred them—instead, adversity only deepened their resolve and strengthened their sense of purpose.

They stood at the front lines, offering hope, tending to wounds, and facing danger with quiet courage and steadfast hearts.

We express our deep pride and heartfelt gratitude to every devoted hand that worked in silence and with selfless commitment. We also remember, with reverence, those who gave their lives while delivering care—they were true martyrs of compassion. Their sacrifice remains a powerful reminder of the humanity at the heart of medicine and a beacon for all who seek to build a more compassionate world.





# ADVOCACY & POLICY UPDATES

## *SAMS Responds to U.S. Sanctions Policy Shift on Syria*

May 14, 2025

**T**he Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) welcomes the United States' decision to lift sanctions on Syria, recognizing this as an important step toward expanding access to lifesaving healthcare for the Syrian people.

“We welcome the lifting of sanctions as it enables us to broaden our critical mission of providing essential medical care. However, for this shift to have real impact, it must open new pathways for humanitarian aid, protect the neutrality of medical workers, and prioritize justice for the Syrian people. With over 16 million Syrians still in urgent need, our work is far from over.”

*“The lifting of sanctions marks the dawn of a new day for Syria – a day that must be defined by dignity, access, and accountability.”*

Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh,  
President of SAMS

As of 2024, over 16.7 million Syrians, nearly 75% of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance, the highest figure since the conflict began. As financial systems and supply chains shift in response to changes in sanctions, it is crucial that humanitarian organizations are supported, not sidelined.

SAMS remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering impartial medical care to all Syrians and calls for continued U.S. leadership in ensuring humanitarian space is protected, justice is upheld, and that lifesaving aid reaches those who need it most.

# An Affront Too Far: A Call for a Ceasefire in Gaza

May 28, 2025

**O**n May 23, an airstrike in Gaza hit the home of a pediatrician, Dr Alaa al-Najjar, killing nine of her children, and seriously wounding her remaining child and husband, also a doctor. As a physician during war, she regularly risked her own life to save others; and tragically, she now faces the unimaginable pain of losing her own family.

Also on May 23, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that Gaza residents may be facing “the cruellest phase” yet of the conflict, denouncing the restrictions on humanitarian aid. A two-month blockade of all aid was partially lifted last week, but falls far short of sustaining 2.1 million people.

The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) condemns the reprehensible treatment of civilians in Gaza and calls again for a ceasefire, open humanitarian access, and the protection of healthcare facilities, their staff, and civilians.

“Each new tragedy in Gaza, such as Dr. al-Najjar’s personal calamity, is an affront against our common humanity and the inherent rights and dignity of every person,” said Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh, the President of SAMS. “This terror must stop and care must be given before more human lives are lost and children become even more traumatized.”

In the past 14 years in Syria, prior to its recent liberation, SAMS provided emergency medical relief to millions during a conflict that caused 12 million to be displaced and killed hundreds of thousands, including scores of its own staff.

“The daily horrors in Gaza, similar to what we witnessed in Syria, is a repudiation of everything we work for,” Dr. Hamadeh said. “If we don’t stand for International Humanitarian Law and against an assault on justice, the roots of indifference will spread even further.”

The UN said that only 19 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals remain operational; though all wrestle with severe shortages of medications and health workers.



*Photo: Destroyed hospitals in northern Gaza  
Source: World Health Organization*

Almost all hospitals in Gaza are damaged or destroyed. New military operations and evacuation orders in Gaza over the past week threatened to close or negatively impact more health facilities.

In Gaza, SAMS provides medical care via mobile units to reach the most vulnerable. It also sends medical supplies, offers urgent dental care and medical education.

The international community’s failure to take an unequivocal moral and legal stand against targeted attacks on healthcare facilities, health personnel, and the patients they serve, and to hold the perpetrators accountable according to international laws has led to a pattern of normalization of such attacks, representing a major step backwards in the implementation of the Geneva Convention.

We demand a clear and unequivocal commitment to ensuring that medical facilities are respected, protected, and off-limits under international humanitarian law, and that all attacks against civilians be investigated and perpetrators held accountable. We can no longer look away.



# Reflections from Europe: Building Bridges for Syria's Future

By Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh, SAMS President

Dear SAMS Members,

I just returned from a productive European advocacy tour, our second in six months, focused on strengthening partnerships and advancing our collective mission to support the Syrian people through sustainable, long-term solutions.

## First stop: London

We met with partners who share our vision. The discussions centered on transitioning from short-term relief to building long-term medical capacity through education, training, and strategic investment. The alignment in goals and values was both evident and encouraging.

## Next: Paris

In meetings with diplomatic representatives, we explored opportunities for deeper engagement in support of stability and recovery. We also shared updates on our upcoming initiatives and extended invitations for continued collaboration. The response was warm and constructive.

## Final stop: Brussels

Across several key meetings with humanitarian and policy stakeholders, we discussed the challenges posed by shifting global funding priorities. While increases in support are unlikely, there remains strong interest in maintaining current levels and investing in development-focused approaches, particularly in health and early recovery. The conversations were candid, forward-looking, and reaffirmed the importance of our continued presence and advocacy.

I want to thank my travel partners, SAMS Vice President-Elect Dr. Abdul Rahman Zanabli, Advocacy Committee Member Dr. Aref Alkali, Dr. Abdulghany Hamadeh, and Advocacy Advisor John Dautzenberg, for their dedication and partnership during this trip.

These visits are about more than just meetings - they're about building trust, deepening strategic alliances, and ensuring that SAMS has a voice in shaping the future of Syria. This work is essential, and I'm confident it will continue with strength under SAMS' new leadership.



A close-up photograph of a person's arm, likely a patient, with an IV drip attached. The arm is resting on a green surface, and the person is wearing a dark blue garment with red and white patterns. The background is blurred.

# SAMS RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

## *New Study: Breast Cancer Diagnosis and Management in an Area of Protracted Conflict*

*By Dr. Mohamed Hamze, SAMS Research Manager*

Hopefully, this is the last time I write using the term northwest Syria (as it's now simply Idlib) after the liberation of the country.

This study, just published in the Avicenna Journal of Medicine, was conducted by a research team I was part of during a time when women with breast cancer in Syria were facing immense and often invisible obstacles to care. It analyzes 192 cases treated at the Idlib Oncology Center between March 2017 and January 2022.

We saw that a considerable portion of patients, 56.5%, were internally displaced. Most presented with late-stage disease: 34.8% at stage II and 59% at stage III. This alone speaks volumes about the challenges in early detection. Late presentation worsens prognosis, reduces treatment options, and heightens emotional and physical suffering.

Our study indicates that nearly all patients underwent mastectomy (96.6%) and chemotherapy (90.7%). What stood out painfully was the delay in initiating radiotherapy, with a median of 229 days. That's nearly eight months. This is a long time for any patient, but especially for someone newly diagnosed, already traumatized, and living through conflict. The reasons for these delays are varied: logistical, financial, systemic.. These findings reaffirm an ongoing recommendation: the urgent need to establish or activate radiotherapy services inside Syria.

We found that Displacement was significantly associated with lower predicted survival ( $p = 0.0038$ ). We also explored a subset of patients who reported exposure to chemical weapons. Although no statistically significant relationship was found between exposure and disease severity, it is an area that requires a deeper look.

Separately, SAMS continues to support cancer care on the ground. In 2024, more than 11,912 oncology consultations were provided. 2,817 of these were for breast cancer. The scale of need remains daunting. This study was made possible through a research partnership between SAMS and Yale University, with support from the MacMillan Center's Program on Refugees, Forced Displacement, and Humanitarian Studies.

Grateful to the research team of doctors and collaborators: Jude Alawa, Fares A. Jamil Debel, M.D, MPH, Ayham Jemo, Molham Khalil, Alaa A., Ahmed Najeb Alhussein, Nour Muhammed Ali Arab, Bayan Galal, Anees Chagpar, Bassel Atassi, Kaveh Khoshnood, and Aula Abbara.

Special thanks to the local team in Idlib; your courage, consistency, and care made this study possible.

Explore the full paper at  
[sams-usa.net/reports](https://sams-usa.net/reports)

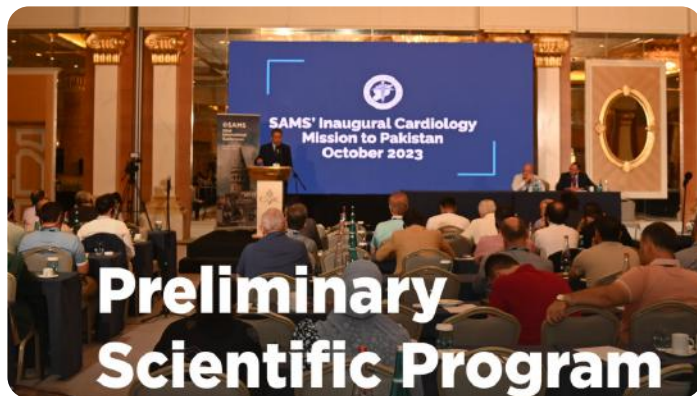




# EVENTS & CONFERENCES



We are now accepting abstract submissions for the Damascus conference. Join your peers in sharing impactful research and medical advancements.



Explore the full educational agenda, including specialized sessions, expert lectures, and interactive workshops.



## SAMS 23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference: The 1<sup>st</sup> in *Free Syria*

July 4 - July 6, 2025

 Damascus University



Register at:  
[society.sams-usa.net/conference-registration/](https://society.sams-usa.net/conference-registration/)

*"This is more than a conference — it's a homecoming. For the first time in Free Syria, we come together to reconnect with our mission, our roots, and one another in a historic gathering of healing and hope."*

Dr. Hazar Jaber, DDS, MBA & Dr. Nidal El-Wiher, MD | Co-Chairs, SAMS 23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference







# SAMS GLOBAL Work Beyond Syria

## *SAMS Interventions in the Gaza Strip*

**W**ith over 90% of the population displaced and only two-thirds of hospitals partially functioning, the humanitarian need in Gaza remains urgent and ongoing. Since January 2025, SAMS has responded with a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to address this crisis.

Between January and March, SAMS and its partners provided essential medical services to over 14,000 individuals, delivering primary healthcare, sexual and reproductive health services, and urgent wound care through a combination of fixed clinics and mobile medical units.

In collaboration with HCDA, SAMS launched a six-month dental health program, equipping a fully

comprehensive dental unit and supporting two operational clinics, which collectively served nearly 3,000 patients during this period. Mental health and psychosocial support services reached thousands, focusing especially on women and children affected by trauma. Plans are also underway to support clinical training for dental students at Al-Azhar and Palestine Universities.

Looking ahead, SAMS is preparing for long-term recovery by rehabilitating essential health facilities, shipping PPE and infection control supplies, and launching two new Comprehensive Primary Health Care Centers in northern and southern Gaza.

**Read our Gaza Flash Updates**  
at [sams-usa.net/reports](https://sams-usa.net/reports)





# MEDICAL MISSIONS

## *Advancing Medical Care and Capacity in Syria*

From May 18 to 22, more than 14 U.S.-based physicians and healthcare professionals traveled to Syria as part of a lifesaving medical mission led by incoming SAMS President, Spanning Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib, the mission aimed to strengthen clinical care and rebuild medical capacity through hands-on training, mentorship, and specialty consultations.

Dr. Rifai, an ophthalmologist and SAMS President-Elect, spearheaded this high-impact effort to deliver advanced services and provider education in some of Syria's most under-resourced hospitals and health centers. "This mission is a continuation of our strategic effort to enhance medical education and restore a high standard of medical care inside Syria," he said. "By focusing on provider education and system-level recovery, we're empowering local physicians and nurses with the skills and confidence they need to deliver world-class care, even in post-conflict settings."

Throughout the week, SAMS volunteers provided bedside teaching, lectures, and case reviews at Aleppo University Hospital, Al-Razi Hospital, Al-Mowasat, Surgical Eye Hospital, and Idlib Central Hospital. Vascular procedures and ultrasound training were performed by Dr. Basel Refai; gastroenterology lectures and advanced GI

procedures were led by Dr. Bayan Alsuleiman and Dr. Muhamad Kamil Obideen; internal medicine rounds and lectures were facilitated by Hospitalist Faysal Rifai. The team also delivered essential newborn care training, a two-day workshop on Autism and ADHD led by Dr. Bariah Duwaji, and cardiac services, including electrophysiology and interventional cardiology, at Alziraa Cardiology Center in Idlib.

This mission reflected a comprehensive approach to humanitarian medicine, addressing immediate needs in mental health, neonatal care, neurodevelopmental disorders, and chronic disease management, while also laying the groundwork for long-term health system recovery.

Fourteen years into the conflict, Syria's healthcare system remains in crisis. With over 70% of medical professionals displaced and millions lacking access to specialized care, SAMS medical missions like this are vital. They not only fill urgent gaps, but also invest in the future by building clinical expertise and restoring hope.

Thank you for standing with us in this ongoing journey. Together, we are shaping a stronger, more resilient healthcare system for Syria.



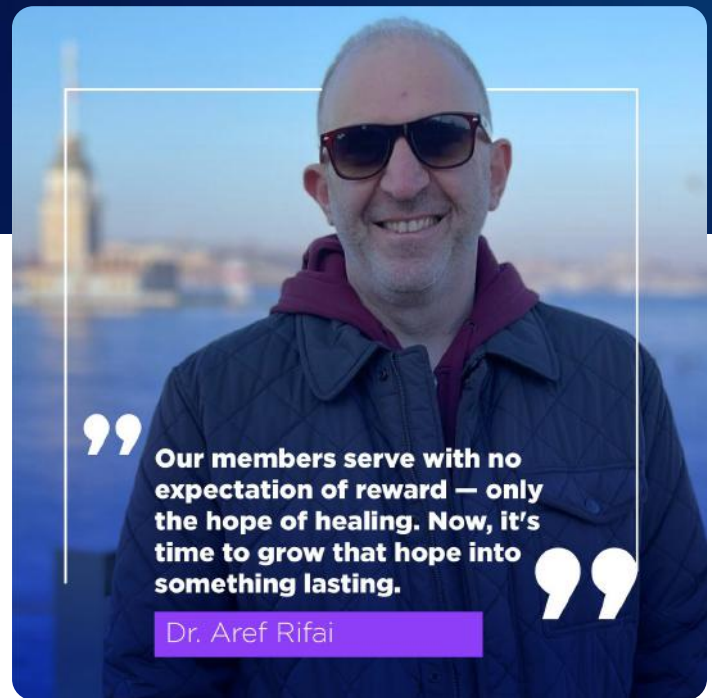
# MEMBERS UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

## *Dr. Aref Rifai*

**D**r. Aref Rifai, a distinguished ophthalmologist and dedicated humanitarian, has been an integral part of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) since 2007. In April 2025, he was elected President of SAMS, stepping into a key leadership role for the next two years. Dr. Rifai has held numerous leadership positions within the organization, including Chair of the Jordan Committee, Society Board Member, and Treasurer - each reflecting his deep commitment to advancing SAMS's mission.

Born in Southampton, England, Dr. Rifai graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Aleppo University in 1989. He went on to complete his internship at the University of Tennessee, a residency in ophthalmology at George Washington University, and a fellowship in vitreoretinal surgery at Louisiana State University. Today, he is the owner and principal surgeon at the Retina Center of Pensacola in Florida, where he is widely recognized for his clinical expertise and compassionate care.

Outside of his professional achievements, Dr. Rifai leads a fulfilling personal life. He and his wife, Rasha, have been married for 35 years and are proud parents of four children. Their eldest son, Faysal, is an



“Our members serve with no expectation of reward — only the hope of healing. Now, it's time to grow that hope into something lasting.”

Dr. Aref Rifai

internist at Advent Health in Orlando, Florida, and is married to Sara Rifai, a dentist. They are raising two sons, Aref Adam and Rami Zayd. Their second son, Fareed, is completing a retina fellowship in Kentucky and will soon join his father at the Retina Center of Pensacola. He is married to Maela Hyder, who is completing her ophthalmology residency at Cornell University in New York. Their daughter, Noor, is an engineer based in Chicago and will begin her MBA studies this fall. Their youngest son, Fares, is graduating from Florida State University and is on the pre-med track.

Dr. Rifai enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with his family. His enduring commitment to medicine and service, both at home and through SAMS, continues to inspire all those who work alongside him.

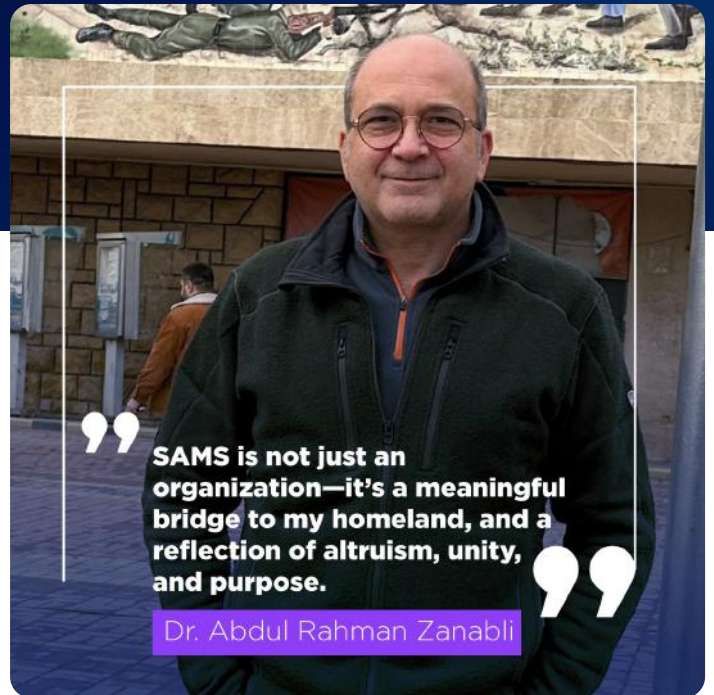


## *Dr. Abdul Rahman Zanabli*

**D**r. Abdul Rahman Zanabli is a board-certified nephrologist and transplant specialist based in Charleston, West Virginia. Originally from Aleppo, Syria, he earned his medical degree from the University of Aleppo in 1993. He completed his residency at Saint Joseph Hospital in Chicago, followed by a nephrology fellowship at Brown University (1998–2000) and a transplant nephrology fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester (2006–2007).

As the founder of Charleston Nephrology, Dr. Zanabli has built a successful private practice and serves as the Medical Director of several regional dialysis centers. He currently holds the position of Chief of Medicine at Charleston Area Medical Center, where he previously served as Chief of Nephrology.

Beyond his clinical leadership, Dr. Zanabli has shown a deep and lasting commitment to humanitarian service through his long-standing involvement with the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS). Since joining in 2005, he has held multiple leadership roles, including serving on the SAMS Society Board and being appointed the first Chairman of the SAMS Foundation in 2012. In 2025, he was elected once again to the Society Board and now serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors.



Outside of medicine, Dr. Zanabli is a devoted husband to Nesreen Chabarek and a proud father of three: Amer, an ophthalmology resident at UT San Antonio; Sarah, a dental student at West Virginia University; and Danny, a high school senior. He enjoys traveling, reading, and spending quality time with his family.

"SAMS is not just an organization - it's a meaningful bridge to my homeland, and a reflection of altruism, unity, and purpose." - Dr. Abdul Rahman Zanabli

We are honored to spotlight Dr. Zanabli's remarkable journey and enduring dedication to the SAMS mission.







## Here's how you can stay engaged:



**Donate** to support emergency  
relief and medical care:  
[sams-usa.net/donate](https://sams-usa.net/donate)



**Volunteer** your time and  
expertise:  
[sams-usa.net/volunteer](https://sams-usa.net/volunteer)



**Advocate** by amplifying our  
message and engaging with  
policymakers

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