

# Statement on the Inclusion of the Responsibility to Protect on the Formal Agenda of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly

Today, 15 September, the UN General Assembly voted by 113 to 21 to include a supplementary item entitled “*The Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity*” on the Formal Agenda for its 72<sup>nd</sup> session. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect commends the General Assembly for this decision and for embracing a substantive discussion on the norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). We would also like to congratulate Australia and Ghana for their leadership of this initiative.

Following the January 2009 publication of the first UN Secretary-General’s report on R2P, UN member states conducted the first and only formal UN General Assembly debate on R2P. The General Assembly then decided to continue the consideration of R2P through annual informal interactive dialogues. Since 2010 the General Assembly has held eight such dialogues during which 120 member states have shared their positions on R2P.

Throughout the past eight years member states have continued efforts to build consensus around R2P, trying to narrow the gap between conceptual progress and meaningful preventive action. Supporters of the norm, as well as those member states with enduring concerns, have regularly called for the General Assembly to hold formal debates on R2P. Most recently, during the eighth informal interactive dialogue on R2P on 6 September, at least 56 member states supported the inclusion of R2P on the General Assembly’s Formal Agenda.

Despite lingering differences of opinion regarding effective implementation of R2P, it remains the most effective principle around which the international community can coalesce when vulnerable populations face the threat of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In these times of global crisis - with 65 million people displaced by conflict, persecution and atrocities – we need fresh ideas on how states, and the international community as a whole, can uphold the principles and norms that safeguard humanity. Any General Assembly debate on R2P should involve consideration of how to strengthen adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, and end impunity for mass atrocity crimes.

The inclusion of R2P on the Formal Agenda of the General Assembly underlines the principled commitment of the UN membership to the prevention of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Not every state will be pleased with today’s outcome, but no state should fear a debate about how the international community should continue to turn this commitment into action and work more effectively to prevent these most conscience shocking crimes.