

Statement on the Anniversary of Atrocities in Syria
Media Release by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
15 March 2012

One year ago the Syrian government began its campaign of violent repression against a peaceful uprising. Today it stands responsible for the deaths of over 7,500 Syrian civilians. Divisions within the United Nations Security Council have emboldened the Syrian government in its ongoing commission of crimes against humanity. This cannot continue. The United Nations Security Council must uphold the Responsibility to Protect and send a strong, unified message to the Syrian government to cease its attacks on civilians.

Despite claims by the government to be implementing reforms, February was the deadliest month yet as the world witnessed a protracted attack on Homs that claimed the lives of over 700 civilians. Now state security forces are widening their campaign to target other Syrian cities and neighborhoods regarded as opposition strongholds using tanks, artillery and mortar fire. The humanitarian situation for populations in these cities is dire, while growing numbers of Syrian refugees are fleeing to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The country stands dangerously close to an all-out civil war that could result in further mass atrocities and catastrophic suffering.

The Responsibility to Protect was created to prevent and protect populations from these mass atrocity crimes and the Security Council's ability to fulfill this responsibility cannot be held hostage by two of its member-states. As prospects for any peaceful resolution of the conflict dwindle, all efforts must be made to urge Russia and China to work with the international community in demanding a halt to further crimes against humanity.

While all measures must be considered, we are deeply concerned that the further militarization of the situation will only lead to more lives lost. The appointment of Kofi Annan as the UN-Arab League Special Envoy on Syria provides a critical opportunity for diplomatic engagement. This moment for a comprehensive political dialogue cannot be lost. Failure of all parties to seize this opportunity will only lead to more divisions, creating an ever more dangerous situation for populations in Syria.

The Security Council has a responsibility to take action in situations where populations are experiencing mass atrocities. In keeping with the Responsibility to Protect we urge Security Council members to:

1. Strongly condemn the unrelenting attacks by the Syrian government on its own people and demand an immediate ceasefire followed by unhindered humanitarian access;
2. Provide their full support and cooperation, both materially and politically, to the diplomatic mission of Kofi Annan;
3. Indicate that the Council is prepared to take additional steps, including imposing an arms embargo, authorizing targeted sanctions, and referring the situation to the ICC, should the Syrian government fail to cease its attacks on civilians.

Signed by the following Board Members and Patrons,

Lloyd Axworthy, President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg, former Canadian Foreign Minister, and patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Roméo Dallaire, Former Force Commander of the UN Mission to Rwanda, Canadian Senator, and patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Thelma Ekiyor, Executive Director, TY Danjuma Foundation, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Gareth Evans, Co-Chair, International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, President Emeritus, International Crisis Group, former Australian Foreign Minister, and co-chair of the International Advisory Board of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Rosemary Foot, Professor of International Relations and Swire Senior Research Fellow, Oxford University, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Lee Hamilton, Director, the Center on Congress at Indiana University, former U.S. Representative of Indiana's Ninth District, and patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Frank Majoor, Former Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the UN, current Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to NATO, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Juan Méndez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, former UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Thomas G. Weiss, Presidential Professor of Political Science, CUNY Graduate Center, Director, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

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