The international refugee law framework, developed in the 1950s, arguably stands at a crossroads. Two of its fundamental principles are international solidarity and protection; indeed, refugee law emerged out of a need for states to provide protection to refugees and to co-operate in so doing. Almost 65 years after the signing of the Refugee Convention, both principles are now clearly under threat. While access to asylum has for decades proved increasingly difficult, often as a result of state restrictionism, the events of 2015 have starkly exposed many fault-lines, including the unwillingness of states in the global north to bear responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees, and marked differences about what such responsibility might entail. With a focus on the current flight of Syrians to the Middle East and to Europe, this paper will explore the concepts of responsibility and protection in the asylum and refugee contexts. It will argue that the idea of “protection” as conceptualised in the Refugee Convention and the UNHCR in the 1950s is no longer sufficient or is being ignored, and is often reduced to “territorial protection” with few rights. Consequently, the claim of the refugee should be reformulated as access to justice, which requires not only access to territory and fair procedures, but also access to an opportunity to establish a life of dignity and meaning, as identified by the refugee.