



**Remarks at high-level event during the Opening of the United Nations General Assembly
on “Freedom of Religion or Belief: An Individual’s Choice” –**

Delivered by Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. United Nations Headquarters, New York, 26 September 2012

Thank you, your Excellencies, the foreign ministers of Canada, Netherlands and Senegal. Thank you Mr. Moderator and your Excellency, the Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It is an honor to be invited here today as a representative of civil society.

The Responsibility to Protect, which was unanimously adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005, has at its core the belief that all human beings should be protected from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

All too often in our world we see that religious intolerance is utilized to incite hatred and can lead to atrocities which shock the conscience of the world.

Right now in northern Nigeria, Syria, Myanmar/Burma and elsewhere, complex conflicts and issues of faith, belief and ethnicity are being manipulated in ways that greatly increase the threat of mass atrocities to vulnerable communities.

The Responsibility to Protect does not seek to create new laws and rights, but asks that states uphold existing responsibilities and universal principals such as freedom of religion, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As an individual whose family emigrated from Northern Ireland I know only too well that history, identity and faith can conspire to breed division and bloody civil conflict.

No society or faith is above reproach. And freedom of belief must also mean the freedom not to believe.

On this holy Jewish day of Yom Kippur we should pause to remember that the Holocaust did not begin with the burning of people, but with the burning of books and Synagogues.

Mr. Moderator, the United Nations should continue to utilize the accepted framework of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect freedom of religion and belief, enhance the rule of law, and prevent future mass atrocity crimes.

I thank you.