



# AP R2P

## Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

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Panelists present at a Public Forum to commemorate Yom HaShoah, co-hosted by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (AP R2P) and the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS Queensland).

# SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

## Never Again: The Holocaust and the Struggle to End Genocide

Presentation by Professor Alex Bellamy, Director of the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, at a Public Forum to commemorate Yom HaShoah

Brisbane, 15 April 2015

Humanity's capacity for conscience shocking inhumanity reached its awful nadir with the Nazi Holocaust.

In 1944, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill condemned the extermination of Jews in unequivocal terms as "the greatest and most horrible single crime ever committed in the whole history of the world". Today we come together to commemorate these events, to remember and acknowledge the victims, and to reaffirm our promise of Never Again.

It is humbling to speak alongside

those whose lives were directly touched by these events, events that still today constitute a stain on our common humanity.

The Nazis slaughtered around six million Jews during the Holocaust. They also killed three million Russian prisoners, 500,000 German opponents and communists, around 70,000 handicapped people, tens of thousands of homosexuals, as well as gypsies. Chief among the non-Jews who were targeted were those who sympathized with or helped the Jews to escape from persecution, torment and death.

The Nazis wrought all this destruction through a deliberate, carefully planned and meticulously orchestrated campaign of mass



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murder whose aim was to use modern technology and the bureaucratic state to achieve nothing short of the complete annihilation of the Jewish people.

As Moshe Katsav wrote: "The Holocaust is not only a tragedy of the Jewish people, it is a failure of humanity as a whole." In light of that failure of humanity, we all have a moral duty to ensure that Never Again will such inhumanity be tolerated; that Never Again will the warning signs of genocide and mass murder be ignored and populations left to their fate; and that Never Again will we choose to look the other way when the victims of atrocities and genocide beg for help.

The Responsibility to Protect was developed as a response to the international community's repeated failure to prevent genocide and protect its victims. It is a commitment made unanimously by all Heads of State and Government in 2005, and reaffirmed unanimously since by both the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council. Its demands are simple and straightforward. It holds that all governments have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; that the international community should assist them to do so; and that when a state manifestly fails to protect its own population from these crimes which shock the conscience of humankind, the international community should take timely and decisive action to protect populations from them.

The Asia Pacific Centre for R2P was established as a partnership between The University of Queensland and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2008 with a mission to deepen knowledge and advance policy on the Responsibility to Protect principle and mass atrocities prevention and response in the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

R2P demands that we take sides when confronted with such gross inhumanity as was endured during the Holocaust. As, Elie Wiesel put it: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure



Presentation by Professor Alex Bellamy.

suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Both R2P, and the work of the Asia Pacific Centre, are driven by this belief.

R2P is a moral imperative for our times. It is a call to arms against genocide and other atrocity crimes that every generation must answer. Implementing R2P and protecting populations in real-world situations is never easy or risk free. Nor will we succeed every time. Sometimes our failures will be spectacular. But we must never succumb to the cynicism of thinking that nothing can be done. The price for this sort of thinking will inevitably be paid in the blood of the victims of future genocides and atrocities.

What can be done to bring "Never Again" closer to becoming a reality? We can all start by challenging the ideologies that give rise to genocide and mass atrocities and by reflecting on the choices that individuals have made in the past and the choices that we can make today in order to do our bit for Never Again.

### Ideology

The Nazis believed that the Aryans were a "master race" and called for the necessary destruction of inferior races or groups, especially those such as the Jews whom, they

believed, could infect or weaken the master race. It hardly needs saying that the Nazis believed such groups to be well beyond the pale of legal or moral protection. They designated them as "life unworthy of life". Indeed, as early as 1923, Hitler argued that the Jews were not fully human. He wrote:

"The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human. They cannot be human in the sense of being in the image of God...Jews are the image of the devil. Jewry means the racial tuberculosis of the nations".

This doctrine, and the extermination ideas that accompanied it, lay at the heart of Nazism from the outset, and is written deeply into the ideologies of today's fascists and anti-Semites. In 1919, Hitler argued that the goal of anti-Semitism must be "the total removal of the Jews" and in *Mein Kampf* insisted that the defence of the civilised world itself depended on the destruction of the Jewish people. Whilst he might not have known at the beginning how he would affect his plans, that the eventual extermination of the Jews was pivotal to Nazi ideology from the outset is absolutely clear.

Preventing genocide starts with changing the mindsets and ideologies that give rise to it, especially ideologies which denigrate groups, and deny their humanity. R2P specifically calls for the prevention of incitement to commit genocide and mass atrocities,



recognizing that this is a necessary precursor to the commission of these crimes. But our efforts need to start well before the incitement to commit genocide and mass atrocities. The hate speech and racial or religious vilification that give rise to incitement need to be challenged too. In its place should be a focus on the constructive management of difference – what we in Australia used to call “multiculturalism”.

It is not difficult to see the ideologies of genocide and mass killing alive and well around the world, especially in the Middle East today. The so-called Islamic State professes just such an ideology. The United Nations now thinks it likely that the group committed genocide against Iraq’s ancient Yazidi population. It has also set out its stall to eradicate or “ethnically cleanse” Christians, Alawites, Shi’ites and moderate Sunnis who reject its extreme and idiosyncratic interpretation of Islam. IS is also waging a systematic war against women and girls, robbing them of their fundamental human rights, denying them an education, and condemning them to lives subject to violence and abuse.

The IS is an organization that, as a matter of proudly held and publically proclaimed ideology, makes no distinction between soldiers and civilians. It makes blanket claims that peoples and individuals that fail to conform to its worldview are legitimate targets for killing. The

**“R2P demands that we take sides when confronted with such gross inhumanity as was endured during the Holocaust.”**



George Stein, Holocaust survivor who was liberated from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on Yom HaShoah in 1945, describes some of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime against the Jewish population during the Holocaust.

IS has shot, beheaded, knifed, bludgeoned, burned and tortured its unarmed victims – every one of these instances a crime against humanity, if not an act of genocide. It stands opposed to the values that sustain our human community.

Thus, what Australia and other friends of the Iraqi government are doing in the Middle East is fulfilling their R2P by assisting the government to protect its own population from terrible crimes. Whatever one thinks of the policies that brought Iraq to this point, governments now face a stark choice between helping the Iraqi government to roll back the IS and protect its people from further atrocities or standing aside and leaving them to their fate. The UN reports that the IS committed genocide against the Yazidis. In the past two weeks, mass graves have been discovered in Tikrit and Yazidi survivors have revealed the awful truth about life under the IS, characterized by public mass rape, beheadings, and the selling of women and girls into sexual slavery.

Without a determined international response, the death toll would have been much higher. Without foreign

help, the Kurdish town of Kobane in Syria would have almost certainly fallen. R2P calls for states, societies and individuals to shoulder their responsibilities and to not turn their backs on genocide and mass atrocities. It is not an easy challenge and sometimes we will fall short of what is required, but it is imperative that governments, civil societies and individuals do all that they can to protect populations from genocide and mass atrocities.

But it is not just on distant shores that vigilance is needed. Hate speech and intolerance has reared its ugly head in Australia too. Last year, Jewish children on their way to school in Sydney were verbally abused and threatened by teens chanting “kill the Jews”. Jewish graves in many towns and cities, including Brisbane, have been desecrated. Verbal abuse is common, even on our university campuses. Chillingly, in 2014, the Sydney based leader of Hizb-ut Tahrir described Jews as the “hidden evil” and called for an endless Jihad upon them. Some leaders of the “Reclaim Australia” group parade themselves on YouTube in front of the Swastika. The Australian offshoot of the fascist



Audience participates in a question and answer session at the event.

Greek “Golden Dawn” organization supports “Reclaim Australia”. On its website, it lauds the desecration of Holocaust memorials by Neo-Nazis and states that its goal is to “expel the parasites” from Australia. These parasites include Australia’s Jewish and Muslim communities.

Australia’s anti-discrimination and hate speech laws must be enforced rigorously to stop the spread of these appalling ideologies. People do not have a “right to be a bigot”. What they do have is a right to life without fear of abuse and violence on the grounds of who they are. Bigotry is where hatred and vilification begin. Hatred and vilification lead to incitement. Incitement can lead to violence and genocide. There can be no room for complacency. We should remember that just a decade before the Holocaust, Germany had a relatively liberal and democratic government.

The first task of promoting “Never Again” therefore is to challenge the bigotry, the hate speech, and the incitement that make the abuse and violent targeting of groups appear normal or justifiable. Government has an important role to play in passing and enforcing laws that prohibit hate speech and incitement and promote difference, tolerance, and protection. But civil society groups, universities and individuals

have important roles to play too. We must take a stand against anti-Semitism and all forms of Hate Speech and racism wherever we find it.

On this, we all have a choice to make about whether or not we will stand up against hate speech and incitement. This brings me to the question of bystanders.

### Bystanders

The Holocaust was made possible by the fact that so many people chose to look the other way.

Historians generally agree that the Nazis did not have to coerce individuals to participate in the slaughter. There is no evidence that the organizations most responsible for the killing found recruitment difficult or that they had to coerce people into killing the Jews.

The Holocaust was made possible not just by Hitler’s “willing executioners” but by those who chose to look the other way – either because they cared little for the fate of those carried away in cattle trucks or locked away in ghettos, feared the retribution of the Nazis, or because they chose not to believe the evidence before their eyes. Genocide everywhere depends upon this combination of ambivalence, fear

and ignorance. That is why genocide denial remains so pervasive today.

At the now infamous Evian conference, called in 1938 to discuss the West’s response to Jewish immigration from Germany caused by the Nazis’ repression and pervasive fears of what might come next, the West was united in its intent to limit further Jewish immigration. France, Holland and Belgium argued that they were already saturated with refugees; New Zealand, Canada and Latin American states argued that unemployment at home prohibited further immigration; Australia argued that it opposed any major migration; US policy was driven primarily by economic concern. All agreed that it was too much trouble to open their gates and let Europe’s Jews seek sanctuary. What an awful mistake that was, yet it is one that is repeated all too often today.

A generous interpretation of these events holds that perhaps governments doubted the Nazis’ intent. It is true that things are plainer with the advantage of hindsight. After all, Raphael Lemkin – the lawyer who’s tireless campaign for justice led to the adoption of the Genocide Convention in 1948 – failed to persuade his own family to flee the Nazis. They simply did not believe that they were in such mortal danger. Likewise, Jewish





AP R2P researcher Dr. Melanie O'Brien speaks at the event.

organizations in the US questioned and doubted the initial reports of the mass extermination of Jews that began to leak out of Nazi occupied Europe after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union.

With today's modern technology, surveillance capacity and global media, it is much more difficult today to claim that we "do not know". With the experience of the Holocaust behind us, it is also impossible for us to doubt the human capacity for great evil when the warning signs – which we now know only too well – point in that direction.

## Rescuers

There were some, however, who did what they could to stand between the victims and the perpetrators of genocide. Israel's Yad Vashem Centre identifies some 21,000 individuals who helped save Jews during the Holocaust, often at great personal risk and cost. These are the "Righteous Among the Nations", and include people of every faith, and every nationality. This opposition to genocide made a difference. It saved not just individual lives but also families, descendants and sometimes whole communities. That individuals, communities and some governments were able to make

a difference and that hundreds of thousands of people – if not more – are alive today who otherwise might not be, is clear testament to the fact that seemingly small actions in support of targeted individuals and groups can make a difference.

In 1943, German plans to deport Danish Jews were opposed and obstructed by the Danish government and people. The Nazis reacted by overthrowing the government and ruling directly. Even after this, the Danish people hid Jews from the Nazis. After a shipping official in Copenhagen leaked German plans to transport the Jews to the death camps, warnings were spread across the country. As a result, when the Germans launched their first raids in October 1943, they found very few Jews. Most were in hiding and were transported to safety in Sweden. Only 475 Danish Jews were ever found and transported. Still the Danes refused to give up, and the Danish government and Red Cross saved many by direct intercession.

In 1944, on the tiny Greek Island of Zakynthos, Mayor Loukas Karrer was ordered at gunpoint to hand over a list of Jews residing on the island. The list, presented to the Germans by Bishop Chrysostomos, contained only two names: Mayor

Karrer and Bishop Chrysostomos. With immeasurable courage, the bishop told the Germans, "Here are your Jews. If you choose to deport the Jews of Zakynthos, you must also take me, and I will share their fate."

Meanwhile all the Jews of the island were safely hidden in the mountainous villages. Though the whole island knew what was happening, not one person revealed their whereabouts. All 275 of the island's Jews survived the Holocaust.

Indeed, throughout Europe there were individuals and groups who did what they could to protect Jews, often at great personal risk. In Poland, offering any assistance whatsoever to Jews was punishable by death. Yet, Yad Vashem has identified more than 6,000 individual Poles as rescuers of Jews. Between them, they helped save 100,000-150,000 Jews from death. Villagers in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in France and Nieuwlande in the Netherland rallied to protect Jews. Each household in Nieuwlande agreed to hide one Jewish family. In April 1943, the Belgian resistance held up a train bound for Auschwitz and freed 231 Jewish prisoners.

In the wake of the kristallnacht pogrom in 1938, Churchill sent a message to America demanding that the world's free peoples confront Nazism head-on: "We are confronted with another theme. It is not a new theme; it leaps out upon from the Dark Ages—racial persecution, religious intolerance, deprivation of free speech, the conception of the citizen as a mere soulless fraction of the State", he continued, 'people say we ought not to allow ourselves to be drawn into a theoretical antagonism between Nazism and democracy; but the antagonism is here now...Is this a call to war?...We need the swift gathering of forces to confront not only military but moral aggression".

Today, this inevitable antagonism that Churchill spoke of, is that between R2P and its supporters and

the groups and ideologies that give rise to genocide and mass atrocities. This is a clash of fundamental ideas and principles. Today, we need our own “swift gathering of forces” to confront moral aggressors everywhere, from the relatively safe streets of Australia where hate speech is nevertheless on the rise to the suburbs of Damascus where civilians are trapped between the Syrian regime’s barrel bombs and the Islamic State’s beheadings. We need to reaffirm faith in humanity and the idea that all people have a right to live lives free of the fear of mass violence. That, after all, is the ultimate goal of R2P and the best way of fulfilling our promise of Never Again.

### **Towards Never Again?**

As the Oxford academic and humanitarian practitioner Hugo Slim wrote recently, although we are not yet at “Never Again”, we might now be at “Not Every Time”

Ultimately, whether R2P becomes a daily “lived reality” that helps us fulfill the promise of Never Again depends on whether individuals in all parts of the world choose to make it so. In the face of genocide and mass atrocities, everyone – and not just those in the affected areas - has a choice to make about whether to employ their talents to help protect others, whether to stand aside in ambivalence, or whether to assist the perpetrators. As experience from the Holocaust shows, those choices have real effects in terms of determining whether people live or die. R2P establishes a moral imperative for individuals to do what they can to protect others from atrocities. Yom HaShoah provides a timely reminder that we must all redouble our efforts if we are to get closer to making Never Again a reality.

Thank you.



**Professor Alex Bellamy, Director, Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect**

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