

## Independent PR Practitioner of the Year

Providing a ‘voice to the voiceless’ has been my principal professional motivation – from reporting the wars of the late 90s and noughties, to communicating about the suffering of victims of terrorism in Lebanon, and torture survivors in Ukraine, the Middle East and beyond. For more than 25 years I have communicated about international affairs, human rights and conflict – explaining complex and sensitive situations in accessible ways, while always placing people at the heart of the narrative.

As a foreign correspondent for the BBC I was based in India, Afghanistan and the Middle East. In 2010 I moved into PR, working for five years as the in-house comms lead for the first international terrorism tribunal, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon – established by the UN Security Council. Later, I led global marketing and communications for WorldSkills, the global not-for-profit which promotes vocational education worldwide through the world championships of skills (2015-2020). I have worked in more than 40 countries.

In 2019-2020 I conceived, designed and taught a masters level course in “Communication in International Conflict” for Ryerson University (now called Toronto Metropolitan University), which examined how different actors use communications in conflict and how best to speak to fractured societies.

### *Consultancy*

After moving to Canada, I was keen to continue my international work and in 2022 I left my secure, permanent role to establish myself as an independent consultant. My vision was to assist international lawyers communicate about the cases and situations they are engaged in. Given the well-established challenges around communications and the legal profession, as well as the tensions that often exist between lawyers and PR professionals, I wanted to use my experience and skills to help lawyers explain the complexities and relevance of their work in our increasingly fractured world.

As a consultant I offer many services especially comms strategy, media relations and op-ed / speech writing. My priority has been to establish deep connections with a small number of world-class clients. These relationships are built on my considerable discretion and diplomacy, as well as my expertise in international affairs and law. Since launching, I have supported a handful of leading international lawyers working on some of the most intractable global challenges. Since September 2023, I have consulted primarily for Dr Alice Edwards, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

### *Work-based challenge*

Dr Edwards is an independent human rights expert, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. Her responsibilities include following up on allegations of torture with governments worldwide. Publicity of alleged crimes is a potent tool to pressure states to change practices.

My brief was broad and ambitious – use earned media, with no budget beyond my fees, to transform public understanding of torture. From a close to standing start, I have used a personalized and entrepreneurial approach to secure coverage in more than 70 countries including many world-class outlets. I have leveraged my extensive contacts with specialist legal, conflict and diplomatic correspondents at prestige international and national publications around the world. I have also

secured strong coverage in the Global South. To support the Special Rapporteur's role as a thought-leader I drafted and placed opinion pieces in prestige international publications.

I also develop national media engagement strategies including in the UK, where we focused on the plight of IPP prisoners who are indefinitely jailed under a now abandoned sentencing regime. This campaign is ongoing and is some of the work I am most proud of in the last year. I secured top-flight national coverage, leading to the Special Rapporteur's remarks being cited in parliamentary debates. She has helped raise public awareness of this terrible miscarriage of justice and the government is taking notice. In November 2023, they made partial reforms.

The Special Rapporteur continues to push for an end to these sentences for all prisoners. At the time of writing, the *Victims and Prisoners* bill is in committee stage in the Lords, with several welcome amendments being closely considered by peers. See supporting materials for more.

### *Commitment to Industry*

Alongside developing my business, I work hard to support the ongoing professionalization of our industry through voluntary work for the CIPR. In 2023, I was on Council contributing to discussions on governance reforms and was an active member of the International Committee. I fixed, co-organized and moderated the most successful CIPR event in the Institute's 75<sup>th</sup> year: the Maggie Nally Lecture with the UN global comms lead. Melissa Fleming outlined the extraordinary challenges of communicating to a divided world through a fractured media ecosystem where misinformation and disinformation flourish. This is the most logged event in this year's CPD cycle and the most viewed YouTube video the Institute published in 2023.

Chartership has been central to my own personal development and I became chartered in 2020. In 2023, I was a chartership buddy mentoring other PR professionals. I also fulfilled a significant ambition when I was appointed a chartership assessor in November.

### *Looking ahead*

After an exhilarating and successful 2023, I am taking my business to the next level – consolidating relationships with existing clients and developing new relationships. My focus remains on clients who are doing transformative work of global importance. The sad reality is that my skills and experience are becoming more relevant by the week.

My engagement with the UN Special Rapporteur is entering a new phase, where we are expanding comms to broader audiences on new platforms. She is currently reviewing a two-year comms strategy I prepared, which takes her communications well beyond news organizations.

My commitment to the industry – and the CIPR – remains strong and I recently joined the Professional Practices Committee, where I am working on guidelines about applying the code of conduct in conflict settings. I remain on Council and am already enjoying being a chartership assessor!

Thank you for considering this entry.