

RESTRICTED

THE LEVESON INQUIRY

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF BARONESS HOLLINS

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I, BARONESS HOLLINS will say as follows:-

1. This statement provides a short account about my family's experience at the hands of the media. We do not relish the thought of any more publicity but our story has both positive and negative aspects and we do want to present a balanced view.
2. There are a number of features of my account which I think are important. My daughter is and always has been a very private person with no wish for celebratory status. She was a young married mother who was pregnant with her second child, when she was stabbed in the neck and very seriously injured in April 2005. She is aware of my statement to the Inquiry.
3. Because we had agreed to go public to help the police in their enquiries, it seemed that the press felt they had the right of complete access to our lives. We all value our privacy and this attitude was hard for us to accept. We also found the behaviour of many of the journalists we dealt with, less than honest. Their expressions of sympathy and caring seemed to mask a desperation to get a better story than their competitors. Extraordinary sums of money were mentioned, which seemed to have the potential for us to be owned in some way by a media company.
4. Because of the press interest and persistence, my husband and I employed a media advisor to help us to manage the press. This was expensive but we felt necessary. Our key strategies were to issue short news updates to the Press Association to try to minimise attempts by different papers to get an exclusive; never to give an exclusive interview; not to accept any money for her 'story'. We were advised that if we gave an exclusive then other papers might turn 'nasty'.
5. Much of the press coverage told my daughter's story in a compassionate way and raised so many people's hopes and spirit that we would not wish to discourage honest and compassionate reporting in any way. It also led to very kind donations being made to a trust fund set up in her name to help with her rehabilitation.
6. But the following aspects of press behaviour were completely unacceptable. It was incredibly stressful for us and came on top of the extraordinary pressures resulting from my daughter's injury.
7. Unwanted intrusion into the lives of several family members- this was not just for a few days but continued for months. On day 1, it took the police some time to evict the journalists trespassing in the family garden - they left with bad grace. We had to take avoiding action all the time when she

was in hospital, as journalists pretended to be visitors in the waiting room, and camped outside the main entrance. My mother in law who was terminally ill had a journalist trick her way into her house, and refuse to leave until she had handed over a photo of my daughter. We had to phone and threaten to call the police before she would leave.

8. My own mother died very suddenly and unexpectedly soon after the attack and this became public immediately whether through phone hacking or by police officers talking to journalists, I do not know. But at my mother's funeral we were escorted to the back door of the church by police officers as they were expecting large numbers of journalists- some apparently saying they hoped for a glimpse of my daughter (she was still in intensive care!). This was incredibly distressing as we faced our grief.

9. A year later, when my daughter and son-in-law went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes after her partial recovery, despite attempts to keep her presence a secret, 2 journalists flew out to take photos of the whole family including her children which were published prominently in The Sun. This gave us concern that our daughters' children would also become intruded upon by the press.

10. Even last summer when my daughter had another baby, we were unsettled to observe that two or three reporters on an apparent rota appeared to be surveilling my daughter's house entrance from a car parked 50 yards away from about 9am to 3pm daily for 3 or 4 weeks. When approached one journalist said he was doing nothing wrong and that the police had already enquired but they could not force him to move. The PCC advised me that they could take no action unless I had the name of the journalist. I assumed it was the Daily Mail because there were always copies of the Mail in the car. When my daughter went out, the journalist followed. I have a long list of similar examples.

11. Inaccurate and sloppy reporting for the sake of having a story was commonplace. If they did not have the facts then they would make them up. An aerial photo of my house which was being built next door to my daughter's was claimed to be for her, and the journalist described what each room would be used for, including a playroom for my grandson. We discovered that a neighbour or friend only had to say two or three words such as 'making good progress' in answer to a persistent journalist to allow the paper to publish a full 2 page spread. Often all they did was to copy, sometimes word for word, a previously published report from the internet (I call this plagiarism). This would lead to repeated dissemination of inaccuracies. One such article contained about 30 facts, of which I recall only 2 were correct. And friends, work colleagues would repeat these so called facts, believing them because they were in the papers.

12. Some newspapers (the Evening Standard was one that published a so-called exclusive on their front page), claimed to have an 'exclusive' and implied that this information had been granted by the family. In fact most of these 'exclusives' were fabricated. This led to extra pressure from the myriad other journalists who had asked for an interview. We experienced The Mail as the worst culprit, on one occasion justifying a misrepresentation by saying that they couldn't understand or agree with the family's perspective and thought that the way they had presented it was the way that their readers would think about the issue.

13. The nature of the media coverage also troubled us, even though it was never negative; quite the contrary. The factual inaccuracies were never of great significance. It was the sensationalism that was hard to take. There was nearly always an emphasis on the crime and the severity of the injury. There was almost no thoughtful discussion of what her injury would mean to my daughter and her

family in the future. In short, the coverage almost always looked back. Since we were always looking forward we tried to ignore it. Some of us found it harder to ignore than others.

14. Sadly we began to distrust people, and didn't feel that we could share information fully, even with close friends and family because we did not know how the press were getting hold of a constant trickle of information.

15. We experienced dishonest behaviour by media companies. On one occasion we had agreed to an article written by myself being reprinted and provided a choice of 2 photographs to accompany it. Both pictures were used although it was explicitly promised that only 1 would be used. The Mail on Sunday apologised and agreed to destroy the photos and not use them again. However they did not destroy them and they did use them again without permission. They made a donation to my daughter's trust fund when I complained, but this was not the point. It was dishonest.

16. Most of the press do not seem to understand or respect the distinction between the personal and professional. As President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists my role required me to speak to the press, but I was invariably and inappropriately referred to as my daughter's mother, thus distracting from my professional opinion/ message.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

DATED : 14 December 2011

SIGNED:



Sheila  
Professor the Baroness Hollins