

The Leveson Inquiry

WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHERIE BLAIR

1. I am a UK Barrister and the wife of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. I was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1995 and I practice as a barrister from Matrix Chambers. I am also a founder and a patron of a charity, The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. I make this witness statement in response to the fourth witness statement of Liz Hartley, head of editorial legal services at Associated Newspaper Limited ("ANL"), which was submitted to the Leveson Inquiry ("the Inquiry") on 17 July 2012.
3. The statement of Ms Hartley was produced for the purpose of the Inquiry in order to address some of the alleged factual allegations against ANL contained in the evidence read in the Inquiry, and to address criticism of ANL's media treatment of myself and my family which was given in evidence by my husband in his submissions to the Inquiry on 28 May 2012.
4. Over a number of years, the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday and ANL generally have shown a disproportionate and hostile approach to their reporting of the activities of myself and my family. This was particularly the case when Tony was Prime Minister but has continued at a significant level ever since. The rights to privacy of our children, Euan, Nicky, Kathryn and Leo were also frequently disregarded over these years. Inaccurate and/or defamatory allegations were published about me and/or

my family in cases where there was clearly no public interest. Photographs of our children were published by ANL without consent.

5. I recognise that, in particular during my husband's time in office, there was of course sometimes a legitimate interest in aspects of my and my family's personal life and I did, and still do, entirely accept that. However, the level of scrutiny and repeated attacks that my family and I were subjected to during the years Tony was in office and beyond, was disproportionate, unbalanced and unjustified.
6. Initially, I attempted to deal with my complaints by sending personal letters to the editor. For example, I attach in exhibit "CB1" letters I retained from the period from 2003-2006 which I wrote personally to ANL with regard to inaccurate and misleading articles, some of which amounted to breaches of the PCC rules. My letters were mostly ignored by ANL. I also wrote very regularly to the PCC who occasionally assisted.
7. In 2003 approximately, I started from time to time to use my lawyer, Graham Atkins (now of Atkins Thomson), to send letters of complaint on my behalf. From mid-2006, when Mr Atkins set up his firm, until recently, there were approximately 30 letters of complaint that were sent to ANL on behalf of my husband, my children or myself. There were more at his previous firm. The complaints concerned either publications that contained facts that were false, misleading, offensive and/or defamatory and clearly intended to damage my reputation, or photographs of me, my husband and my children which were inherently private and constituted a breach of our privacy. This activity, which took place over a prolonged period of time, amounted to a targeted campaign against me and my family, as mentioned by Tony in his evidence to the Inquiry. I know of no reason for such a campaign, but the fact remains that complaints against ANL were far more regular and the articles far more personal than those published in any other newspaper.

8. There were dozens of articles over the years which sought to portray me in a negative light and almost every article was accompanied by the most unflattering photograph that could be acquired. In fact, I can recall only two or three articles, of a vast number that were published in the last decade by ANL, that had anything positive to say about me and and/or my family. It was in particular extremely difficult over the years to protect my children from an unacceptable level of intrusion and upset.
9. I believe that the number of unpleasant articles emanating from the ANL far exceeds both in number and in tone the number of similar articles which any spouse of the leader of a political party might expect from the newspapers in general.
10. Undoubtedly, with their large team of in-house and external Counsel, articles published by ANL were careful in many instances to stay on the right side of the law as they would not wish me to have a cause of action. There were scores of such articles – they were unpleasant, but not always strictly defamatory. The fact remains that my lawyer wrote to ANL on 30 occasions and, though since 2006 we have from time to time secured apologies, corrections and occasionally sought and received damages, it was on all too few of those occasions. The reason there were very few legal actions issued was that on many occasions issuing proceedings for libel or for breach for privacy and/or confidence, would have attracted yet more attention to myself and my family. So I was often prepared to take a reasonable view and to accept apologies and clarifications rather than always to pursue damages. It is for that reason that out of at least 30 legal interventions, only a few resulted in the issue of legal proceedings. However, all of the articles contained numerous factual inaccuracies and they were, more often than not, deliberately offensive and drew completely unwarranted attention to me and the children.

11. Over the years, both Tony and I have tried to keep our children out of the public eye and out of the newspapers as much as possible. It was the motivating factor behind many of the numerous letters sent to the newspapers in general, and ANL in particular. Despite my repeated insistence of wanting to maintain my children's privacy, ANL made every attempt to bring them into the public eye. There was a time when I used images of the whole family, including the children, on annual Christmas cards which were sent not to the media but only to family and friends. However, I had to stop this practice because Tony and I were accused of exposing our children to publicity and exploiting them for political advantage. As for the examples that Ms Hartley cites in paragraph 31 of her witness statement, I would say that there were very few occasions over the 13 years that Tony was leader of the Labour Party when we were photographed as a family, including the children. No modern politician with children can keep them hidden away from the media completely, and none do so. But that shouldn't and doesn't mean that their right to privacy at other times is forfeit. Incidentally, the occasion when my husband was photographed in Downing Street holding a mug with a photo of our children was not deliberate and was in no way a true reflection of our attitude towards the press's intrusion in our children's life.

12. I would also like to point out that ANL, and the Daily Mail in particular, are still pursuing my children, especially Euan. Earlier this month, Daily Mail journalists made a series of inquiries about Euan, in which they made untrue allegations about a recent shopping trip in New York. It appears that the Daily Mail is now seeking to invent stories which, if published, would be damaging to Euan's reputation. There can be no genuine public interest in publishing information concerning the private lives and activities of my children. They have never sought publicity themselves, and are not public figures.

13. In relation to paragraphs 32 to 36 of Ms Hartley's statement, I would argue that the references to our children, far from being innocuous and incidental, were intended to intrude, were often unpleasant, and were certainly not in the public interest. In terms of photographs, ANL and its journalists should have been well aware that it is a breach of the PCC Code to publish a photograph of a child without parental consent. Instead, they continued to ignore this as well as my repeated requests to leave my children out of the public eye. Saying that Tony (or indeed I), published photos of Leo in our books was irrelevant. They were all old pictures, deliberately not current ones, to protect Leo, his privacy and his security.

14. Paul Scott is one of the Daily Mail's journalists who has made a career out of writing about me and my family. In one of his books "Tony and Cherie: the Special Relationship", he saw fit to pass judgment and speculate wildly about matters such as our sex life and other private matters. His books were always serialised in the Daily Mail before their official publication. He claimed I was associated with various new-age rituals and bizarre witchcraft practices none of which was true. These allegations, whilst no doubt deliberately staying (just) on the right side of the law, were designed to damage my reputation as a successful and serious lawyer

15. Whilst it is true that other newspaper groups together with ANL have written sometimes unpleasant and/or inaccurate articles about me, complaints against other publications, including those controlled by News Group Newspapers, were dealt with more reasonably and sensibly by their lawyers. This was never the case with with ANL, and the Daily Mail in particular, and it was the only newspaper that rarely had a good word to say about me and my family.

16. It is nonsense to assert, as Ms Hartley does, that ANL "took care not to intrude on my family's private life" and that the number of complaints made was, in her opinion, relatively low. On the contrary, I consider the number of complaints, along with the dozens of unpleasant articles that were not complained about, to be very

significant, and I do not believe that this shows any care or consideration on the part of ANL. Indeed, the opposite is true.

17. I note that Ms Hartley describes the vast majority of my legal interventions to be about issues she considers to be “trivial” and “inconsequential”. Whilst some articles have featured me in a minor way and may seem insignificant to the general readership, there was always an unpleasant element to them, and the fact that they appeared so frequently, however minor they may seem, constituted a deliberate campaign to damage my reputation both professionally and personally.
18. By way of example I refer to her Paragraph 26, Ms Hartley highlights one of my allegedly 'trivial' complaints to the Mail, concerning 'a story about celebrity flunkies' in which someone described himself as my personal trainer. In fact he had not worked for me. My complaint was entirely justified, as it is not a harmless story. Categorising me as one of the 'celebrities' who have 'flunkies' was clearly designed to be damaging to my professional reputation. There were many instances of this kind.
19. I refer to paragraph 28.1 of Ms Hartley's Statement. Contrary to what has been said, these were not meetings of government ministers, or indeed meetings at all, and therefore it was wrong for the Mail to claim that, despite being unelected, I was seeking to insinuate myself into government business. The events were a series of monthly formal lectures by eminent people from outside government on a wide range of topics. The lectures were chaired by Tony and attended by many outside experts as well as by government ministers. Each lecture was followed by a Q & A which I chaired and by a reception that I hosted as the wife of the Prime Minister. It was quite unreasonable to misrepresent the events as the Mail has done, as if I was acting as an elected member of the government.

I refer to paragraph 29 of Ms Hartley's statement. My involvement with Peter Foster was a matter of public knowledge. I have extensively described the circumstances regarding the purchase of the Bristol flats in my memoir. However, it was, again, incorrectly stated that the flats were acquired securing a substantial discount, and that the purchase was negotiated by Peter Foster. There was no substantial discount and I handled the purchase myself.

20. Ms Hartley refers to a number of articles in respect of which my solicitors have complained, that were not pursued any further than the initial stages (paragraphs 37-42). It is correct to state that some of the complaints were not followed through but I simply could not have been expected to pursue every complaint with the same vigour and commitment because of time and costs constraints. With many complaints I did not set out to pursue damages, but to achieve a correction or apology and cover my costs which is why, in some instances, I decided it was commercially wiser to accept settlement, or simply put down a marker and move on. With the one exception of the Gaddafi allegation which I deal with below, I found that the ANL tended not to repeat allegations challenged by a solicitor's letter even if not pursued to litigation.

21. With respect to the article in the Daily Mail *"As Blair Shows Off his Man Boobs...Brown Reveals They Still Keep in Touch"*, Tony obtained damages and costs for infringement of privacy over long-lens photography when we were on holiday. In respect of the article in the Daily Mail *"From Parliament to Riches: How Blair amassed £20m fortune"*, which claimed that Tony amassed well over £5m fortune from the proceeds of his memoir, when in fact, the proceeds all went to the Royal British Legion. He obtained a correction, payment of costs and a donation to his charity. In other instances, all my lawyers asked for in relation to certain articles was for them to be removed from the newspapers' databases.

22. The issues I complained about to both ANL and the PCC, at exhibit "CB1", included pictures of Nicky when visiting the Vatican; allegations about me getting discounts on clothes when at No.10; my "gaffes" which allegedly led to arguing with President Bush, arguing with Alastair Campbell which allegedly led to his leaving No 10; allegations that I was behind the closure of Whitehall for a film that Euan was working on; allegations that I was hoping to get a £200,000 part-time job to do with the Olympics; fabricated situations with Fiona Miller at No.10; staying at Tony Blair's "suite" at Jerusalem Hotel when visiting Israel; complaints about long lens and aerial photographs of our country home; and claims that I've earned £68,000 in one week.
23. In respect of the complaints in relation to the article "*Cherie Blair At Centre of NHS Sleaze Row*" in the Mail on Sunday and the article "*Even Republicans can be Polite*", in the Evening Standard, which alleged I had been rude and offensive to the Queen, I secured an apology and damages. In respect of the article "*BBC splashes £100,000 on Cherie: The Documentary*", which stated that I behaved in a high-handed and offensive manner to members of the BBC crew (I received a letter of support from Fiona Bruce, the BBC presenter on the programme, which states she was horrified to read the allegations in the Daily Mail and found them "an utter mendacity"), I obtained an apology, damages, and the payment of costs. I secured an apology along with damages and costs regarding the article in the Daily Mail "*Outrage as Mandy goes on a country shoot with Gaddafi son (And surprise, Cherie came too)*". The facts were that I have never met Saif Gaddafi nor been on a country shoot. This was, astonishingly, republished a second time, and I again received damages, another apology and legal costs.
24. I attach in my exhibit "CB2" many of the letters of complaint that were sent on my behalf to ANL.

25. I stand by everything that Tony said in his evidence to the Inquiry. I believe that Ms Hartley's analysis of the evidence is therefore a partisan and inaccurate reflection of ANL's clear and blatant treatment of me and my family.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts in this Witness Statement are true.



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Cherie Blair

Dated the 21st day of October 2012