

## Ten years on, a call for justice for the murder of photojournalist Anton Hammerl in Libya

### #JusticeforAnton

**LONDON, UK** - Just days before the tenth anniversary of photojournalist Anton Hammerl's death, his widow Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl has launched a campaign to seek justice for his murder. [Anton Hammerl](#) was shot and fatally wounded in Libya by forces loyal to Gaddafi on 5 April 2011. He was covering the 2011 Libyan conflict as a freelancer.

After a decade with no action, no answers and no accountability, Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl has instructed a legal team from [Doughty Street Chambers](#). Her intention to renew the pursuit for justice for Anton was announced in an online launch and press briefing earlier today (1 April 2021), hosted by Doughty Street Chambers with participation from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), who are supporting the family.

Anton's body has never been located and there has been no investigation into the circumstances of his death, or the aftermath, by the Libyan, South African, Austrian or UK authorities, or any other law enforcement or investigative body.

For over six weeks his family was led to believe by the Libyan authorities that he was alive, well and detained with two American journalists, Clare Gillis and [James Foley](#), and a Spanish photojournalist, Manu Brabo.

Few steps were taken by the South African or Austrian authorities to locate and return his remains. Three complaints were submitted today to United Nations experts by Doughty Street Chambers, marking a new chapter in the quest to obtain justice for Anton.

The complaints were submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, Irene Khan, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Dr Morris Tidball-Binz, and the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, requesting that they raise their concerns about Anton's case with the Libyan authorities; urgently request information from the South African, Austrian and UK authorities; and take steps to ensure an investigation into the circumstances of Anton's death and disappearance now take place, including an investigation into the whereabouts of his remains so that they may be recovered and returned to his family.

Anton, an award-winning photojournalist, was a dual South African and Austrian national and a UK resident, living in Surbiton, Surrey, at the time of his death.

The legal complaints filed with the United Nations today state that there was *"a clear indication from the outset that Mr Hammerl, a civilian, had been unlawfully targeted and that there were reasonable grounds to suspect that his killing constituted a war crime"* in violation of international law. The available evidence suggests that Anton was unlawfully killed by members of the Libyan armed forces, and there is a suspicion that Anton was the victim of enforced disappearance.

The complaints also address the aftermath of his death, stating, *"as a consequence of the spread of misinformation about his fate in the immediate aftermath of his disappearance, when Mr Hammerl's family was led to believe that he was still alive and detained with his fellow journalists, a clear opportunity to investigate the circumstances of his killing, and, at the least, to locate his body, and to return his remains to his family was missed. The likely deliberate misleading of his family to believe that Mr Hammerl was still alive was a particular cruelty. As a result, his family have been denied the right to know Mr Hammerl's fate."*

Anton's case is emblematic of the ongoing impunity concerning war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by government forces in Libya at that time, including killings of journalists and other civilians and enforced disappearances. It is also emblematic of the barriers faced by bereaved families when a loved one's remains are not located and repatriated, and they do not receive automatic entitlement to a coroner's inquest, and when journalists die in freelance roles.

**Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl** said, *"It's been 10 years since our lives were torn apart. We were just an ordinary family, and we trusted the governments involved to help us bring Anton home and investigate his death. None of that has happened."*

*"It is unacceptable that anyone should lose their lives the way Anton did without any sense of culpability. Ten years on, we ask you to help us get justice for Anton's killing. Someone needs to answer."*

**Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC**, counsel for the family, said, *"Anton Hammerl was a courageous, brilliant journalist who entered Libya at a time when al-Gaddafi's forces were suspected of committing serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Anton was there to bring accurate accounts of these atrocities to the world's attention, but he himself was then targeted and killed."*

*"Journalists play an important role in bearing witness to armed conflict. In doing so, they both exercise their own right to freedom of expression and perform a public service. The death and disappearance of a journalist in these circumstances is a matter of grave concern and calls for investigation."*

**Rebecca Vincent**, RSF's Director of International Campaigns, said, *"We stand in full solidarity with Anton Hammerl's family and are proud to support their campaign for #JusticeforAnton. No family should have to endure what they've been through over the past decade, left with few answers and no accountability for his murder. Every time impunity is allowed to prevail in the killing of a journalist, the door is left open for further such attacks, making it less safe for journalists to do their jobs around the world. When we campaign for #JusticeforAnton, we campaign for an end to impunity for the killings of journalists, and for better protections for journalists everywhere."*

Diane Foley, James Foley's mother and president and founder of the [James W Foley Legacy Foundation](#), joined the launch event to express her solidarity and support for the campaign.

James was working with Anton on the day he died and was an eyewitness to Anton's murder on 5 April 2011. In 2012 James, Clare Gillis and New York based photographer David Brabyn, were instrumental in organising the [Friends of Anton](#) fundraising auction. This auction of contemporary photojournalism from esteemed photographers such as Joao Silva and Lynsey Addario, held at Christies in New York on 15 May, honoured Anton and supported the education of his three children.

Support the #JusticeforAnton Crowdjustice crowdfunder - <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/justice-for-anton-hammerl/>.

## Background

- On 28 March 2011 Anton Hammerl travelled to Libya to cover the violent uprising against the Gaddafi regime.
- On Monday 4 April 2011, Anton skyped his family, informing them he would drive with a group of journalists to a location some distance from Benghazi to report on the conflict.
- They didn't hear from him again and on 7 April 2011 the family learned from Human Rights Watch in Geneva that Anton was believed to have been captured by Gaddafi loyalists, along with three other journalists – American journalists Clare Gillis and [James Foley](#), and Spanish photojournalist Manu Brabo.
- The family mounted a campaign for Anton's release – all the while believing he was being detained by the Libyan government.
- 44 days later they learnt that on 5 April 2011 Anton had died in the desert, just outside of Brega, an oil town in eastern Libya.

- Anton was shot and fatally wounded when the group of journalists came under direct fire from pro-Gaddafi forces on 5 April 2011.
- Once they were released from captivity and safely out of Libya across the border in Tunisia, journalists Clare Gillis and James Foley called Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl on 19 May 2011 to share an eyewitness account of Anton's death.
- For six weeks after he was fatally wounded, Anton's family had been misled by information provided by the Libyan authorities that he was detained and alive and well. The family only discovered the truth after Clare Gillis and James Foley were released.
- Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl said at the time, "it is intolerably cruel that Gaddafi loyalists have known Anton's fate all along and chose to cover it up."

**ENDS**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**What are the UN Special Procedures?**

The Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights issues, supported by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

**Why do the UN Special Procedures matter as a first step in Anton's case?**

Although Anton's family are entitled to an investigation as a matter of international law, it is ten years since his murder and no steps have yet been taken to investigate within Libya. The family is now asking the UN Special Procedures to take action, exercising their powers to act in cases of reported violations of human rights and gathering information. What is needed now is an investigation, to answer the family's questions and secure evidence.

If you missed the launch and press briefing, a video will be available to view on the Doughty Street Chambers YouTube channel after the event has concluded:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD2xCYEF9459bK05UDdixSg>.

More information about #JusticeforAnton campaign can be found here:

- Support the #JusticeforAnton Crowdjustice crowdfunder - <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/justice-for-anton-hammerl/>
- Website – [justiceforanton.com](http://justiceforanton.com)
- Twitter – @justice\_4\_anton and follow the campaign hashtag #JusticeforAnton
- Facebook page – Justice for Anton Hammerl

Penny Sukhraj-Hammerl is represented by Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, Tatyana Eatwell and Catherine Meredith at Doughty Street Chambers. For interviews, please contact Bronwyn Friedlander, [bronwyn.friedlander@gmail.com](mailto:bronwyn.friedlander@gmail.com)

Rebecca Vincent, RSF's Director of International Campaigns, is available at [rvincent@rsf.org](mailto:rvincent@rsf.org).

[Anton](#) was one of six journalists and media support workers killed in Libya in 2011 (Source: Committee to Protect Journalists database of attacks on the press).

**Anton Hammerl biography**

Anton, 41 when he died, was a talented photojournalist who was a former picture editor and chief photographer of the Saturday Star, in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2006 he moved to London, where he freelanced, shooting news and corporate work.

His awards include the 1997 World Press Photo Joop Swart Masterclass; the Abdul Shariff Humanitarian photographer of the year award 1997 and 1999; Mondi Shanduka Photographer of the year 2005 and the Fuji Africa News Image of the year 2006.

In September 2011, the [South African National Editors' Forum](#) honored Anton at the Nat Nakasa Award ceremony, an annual award recognising integrity in South African journalism. Instead of giving the usual award – the award criteria dictate it must go to a living, working journalist – the judges chose to recognise Anton for his bravery and dedication to photojournalism.

Anton began his career in news photography in the early 1990s in South Africa, covering the final years of apartheid and the country's transition to democracy. He was mentored in the early years of his career by several leading South African photojournalists, including [Ken Oosterbroek](#).