

PRESS RELEASE AND FAMILY STATEMENT

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FAMILY OF JOURNALIST KILLED IN SOUTH SUDAN SAY GOVERNMENTS HAVE FAILED HIM, AND CALL FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO HIS DEATH

Today, 26 August 2021, marks the four year anniversary of the killing of freelance journalist Christopher Allen in South Sudan. Mr Allen was a dual British-American citizen, and he was killed on 26 August 2017 whilst reporting on the civil war in South Sudan. At the time of his death Mr Allen was covering a rebel offensive in the southern town of Kaya, situated on the border with Uganda, and close to the border with Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the absence of any official investigation, information gathered through journalistic investigations and the results of a private autopsy suggests that Mr Allen was deliberately targeted by the South Sudanese government soldiers, despite the fact that he was clearly unarmed and only carrying a camera. After Mr Allen's death, shocking images were widely shared online showing his body, which had deliberately been stripped naked.

Mr Allen is not the only journalist to have been killed in the course of the civil war in South Sudan. At least 10 journalists were killed since 2014, amid a rise in hostility towards the press, and expert NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have documented multiple instances of the authorities subjecting journalists – both local and foreign journalists – to harassment, arbitrary detention, surveillance and attacks.

Based on the information that has been gathered, Mr Allen's family and their international legal team say there are grounds to suspect that his killing, and the subsequent treatment of his body, may each amount to war crimes. There has still been no justice, and no official investigation into the killers or the circumstances of his killing by the South Sudanese authorities or any other law enforcement agency. This is despite lawyers for the family and RSF repeatedly requesting that South Sudan ensure an independent, impartial criminal investigation take place, and despite a formal request to the US authorities, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in August 2019 – two years ago – to open a criminal investigation into whether war crimes were committed against Christopher Allen, an American citizen. They asked US authorities to investigate two alleged breaches of the US's own War Crimes Act: one concerning the way in which Mr Allen was killed, and one concerning the degrading treatment of his body after his death.

Given the ongoing failure to investigate the circumstances of Mr Allen's death and the aftermath, one year ago, in August 2020, the then United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, Dr Agnes Callamard, called upon the FBI to conduct an independent investigation

into Mr Allen's killing and the subsequent treatment of his body. Those calls were welcomed by RSF and Mr Allen's family. However, one year later, and on the fourth anniversary of his death, the UN's call has not yet been heeded.

The UK and the US governments say they have each raised concerns with South Sudanese government officials over the killing of Mr Allen. Documents obtained by the family as a result of a subject access request to the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) show that the British Ambassador to South Sudan raised Christopher's case with the South Sudanese Minister of Defence in 2020 and appears to have been promised "a report into the circumstances" of the killing, but the South Sudanese government provided no timeline for the completion of that report, and over a year has passed with no report having been received by Christopher's family.

However, Mr Allen's family say that the USA and the UK raising concerns with South Sudan does not go far enough, and that these two countries of his citizenship must do more. Today, on the fourth anniversary of Christopher Allen's death, his family call on the US Government to commit to a formal investigation into his death, and they call on the UK Government to support this request.

Joyce Krajian and John Allen, Christopher Allen's parents, said:

"After four years of insignificant progress, we are again demanding that the Biden administration ensure that there is a full, transparent investigation and justice for the killing of our son.

Despite our appeals to President Biden (which were unanswered), the State Department, our senators and the FBI, we still do not know the full circumstances of Christopher's death. Forensic evidence and journalist accounts suggest that South Sudanese forces deliberately targeted him, a US citizen and journalist. For us, our son and the freedom and safety of the press, your action is critical."

Jeremy Bliss, Christopher Allen's cousin, added:

"The international community has an obligation to act, and to act now. It is crushing that, four years on, there has been such limited progress. Chris' home countries, the US and the UK, must ensure there is justice and accountability for his killing. The US should immediately commence a full investigation. The UK must support the family's request for this investigation. And, the UN must also examine its own conduct: Chris' body was in an UNMISS morgue before repatriation and we are concerned UNMISS impeded the process to secure evidence and thus the investigation of the killing. No family should have to wait four years for answers. We are still waiting for the US, UK, UN and South Sudan to even start asking the right questions."

Barrister **Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC**, a member of the international legal team representing Mr Allen's family, said:

"Christopher Allen was a talented, brave young journalist, killed by South Sudanese armed forces when he was performing a vital public service, reporting on the conflict in their country. There is reasonable cause to suspect that war crimes were committed against Mr Allen, both in his killing and the appalling treatment of his body after death. It has been two long years since the family first formally requested the US authorities to investigate these suspected war crimes. Those calls went unanswered by the Trump administration throughout 2019 and 2020. It is gravely disappointing that the Biden administration – despite their stated commitment to human rights and press freedom – has followed in those Trump footsteps and failed to ensure these suspected war crimes against a US citizen are fully investigated."

Solicitor **Hugo Mason**, of the Allen family’s international legal team, added:

“The family has repeatedly called on the two countries of Christopher Allen’s citizenship – the USA and the UK – to do all they can to secure accountability for his killing, in the absence of action by South Sudan. The ongoing dereliction from all sides sends an alarming message: that a journalist can be killed with impunity. This must change.”

RSF has been supporting the family and working closely with them to secure justice for Christopher Allen’s killing. **Rebecca Vincent**, RSF’s Director of International Campaigns, said:

“Reporters Without Borders continues to support Christopher Allen’s family in their pursuit of justice and accountability for his murder in the line of duty. No family should have to endure what they have faced over the past four years, with not only the South Sudanese authorities failing to investigate this horrific crime, but an inexplicably lacklustre response from Christopher’s own governments. We call again for concrete action by the US and UK to secure an investigation without further delay, in line with their commitments to defending media freedom and ensuring better protections for journalists globally”

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Notes to Editors:

1. The campaign to secure justice for Christopher Allen is led by his family members, particularly his parents, Joyce Krajian and John Allen, and his cousin, Jeremy Bliss, with support from Reporters Without Borders (RSF).
2. Any press requests should be directed to Hugo Mason at hugo.mason@howardkennedy.com or Rebecca Vincent at rvincent@rsf.org.
3. South Sudan is ranked 139 in RSF’s 2021 World Press Freedom Index. More information is available [here](#).
4. Further details of Dr Agnes Callamard’s statement in August 2020 can be found [here](#).
5. With RSF’s support, Christopher Allen’s family created an online memorial and a writing prize, which were launched in December 2020 to mark his 30th birthday. The background is available [here](#). Today, on the fourth anniversary of his killing, his family open the call for entries for the Inaugural Christopher Allen Prize for Writing. Details are available at <https://www.christopherallen.org/news/press-release-christopher-allen-prize-for-writing-aug-21>.
6. The international legal team consists of solicitors Mark Stephens CBE and Hugo Mason, Howard Kennedy LLP, and barristers Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, Jonathan Price and Tatyana Eatwell, Doughty Street Chambers.