

EMBARGOED UNTIL 22:30 (10:30 pm) on
Friday 9 October

Ben Emmerson QC receives CBE in
Queen's Birthday Honours List

Barrister Ben Emmerson QC has been awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for services to international human rights and humanitarian law.

Ben Emmerson is an international lawyer who has acted in a long list of cases involving serious international human rights issues. He represented the widow of Alexander Litvinenko in the 2016 public inquiry into her husband's assassination in London in 2006 by Russian agents who poisoned him with the radioactive isotope Polonium 210. He also represented the Government of Ukraine in a series of cases against Russia arising out of the invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, the war in eastern Ukraine, and the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines passenger aircraft MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014. He previously represented the Government of Georgia following the Russian invasion of South Ossetia in 2008.

Emmerson served for six years as the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism, and for five years as a Judge on the UN international criminal tribunals set up to try war crimes committed in

Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia, achieving the equivalent UN rank of the Assistant Secretary-General.

During a 35-year career at the Bar, Emmerson also represented Katherine Gun, a GCHQ agent who was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for whistleblowing on the Blair Government's decision to take part in a US operation to spy on other members of the UN Security Council in the run-up to the Iraq War; and appeared in a long list of leading international law cases.

He successfully represented the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj on war crimes charges at the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague; the President of the Maldives, Mohammed Nasheed who was deposed in a coup and imprisoned on bogus terrorism charges; and the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Arseny Yatsenyuk, who was charged in absentia by Russian prosecutors in a politically motivated prosecution for terrorist offences in Chechnya. He also represented the exiled President of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont in international litigation concerning Spain's attempts to arrest and prosecute him for holding an independence referendum in Catalonia in 2018.

Earlier in his career, Emmerson led the litigation in the European Court of Human Rights that established the right of gay men and lesbians to serve in the UK armed forces; he led the legal challenge to the Blair Government's anti-terrorism legislation that permitted indefinite detention without trial; and he was responsible for the development of the so-called "positive obligations" doctrine that now requires the police and other public bodies to protect victims of violent crime from the violation of their right to life (the *Osman* case). He also represented the British Government in successfully resisting a challenge to the UK laws on Parliamentary immunity. He appeared as lead counsel in international litigation concerning the scope of diplomatic immunity, and in most of the leading cases decided by the House of Lords on the application of the Human Rights Act to different areas of English law.

In *Official Secrets*, the recent film about the Katherine Gun case, Emmerson was portrayed by Ralph Fiennes (appearing opposite Kiera Knightley as Gun). In the 2019 Old Vic production of Lucy Prebble's award-winning play *A Very Expensive Poison* (about the murder of Alexander Litvinenko) Emmerson was played by actor Thomas Arnold.

Emmerson has been described in Chambers and Partners Guide to the legal profession as “*one of the top ten silks in the country*”. The former Prime Minister Teresa May described him in Parliament as “*one of the UK’s most distinguished lawyers in the field of national and international human rights law*”. In 2016, the Lawyer Magazine awarded Emmerson its prestigious Barrister of the Year Award.

Emmerson is a Master of the Bench at Middle Temple, an Honorary Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford and a Visiting Professor of International Law and Security at the University of Oxford. He holds an honorary PhD from the University of Bristol.

Responding to the announcement, Emmerson said:

“I was both chuffed and at the same time humbled when I heard the news. I am sensitive to the debate surrounding the continued use of the word “empire” in the name of the award, but from a purely personal point of view, it’s a great way to mark the end of what has been an amazing and rewarding 35 year career at the Bar, and a great way to start the next chapter of my life. I am leaving the Bar at the end of this month to move on to a new challenge, and this is a high note for me to go out on.”

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