Joe Holmes

Junior Counsel - Above 15 Years
CALLED 2009

"One of - if not the best international lawyer operating in the rule of law realm. "
CHAMBERS AND PARTNERS, 2026

Joe is a human rights specialist who is in demand in the fields of international human rights law, international criminal law, rule of law, extradition, disciplinary and regulatory law, public law and complex crime.

An “impressive advocate”, who is “absolutely wonderful” with a “fantastic legal mind”, Joe practises in the UK and internationally, applying his expertise gained internationally to a range of domestic fields. His recent instructions have included:

- Counsel for President Milosevic’s intelligence chief in the first full retrial in international criminal law history (before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals)
- Acting for footballing agent Willie McKay in civil contempt of court proceedings arising in the context of a claim between FC Nantes and Cardiff City Football Club, concerning the death of footballer Emelieno Sala
- Acting in proceedings before the Kosovo Specialist Chambers alleging contempt of court in the trial of the former President of Kosovo
- Advising in a case of intimidation / transnational repression in the UK by a large multi-national corporation against a foreign asylum holder

- Criminal Justice Adviser to the British High Commissioner in the Maldives, advising on counter-terrorism and anti-corruption matters
- An appeal before the High Court concerning the compatibility of the Romanian Criminal Code with the Extradition Act 2003 (section 20)

Joe has acted at most of the international criminal tribunals. Described as a "*powerhouse in International law*". he has defended civilian and military leaders as well as the interests of victims at the ICC, ICTY, ICTR, SCSL, IRMCT and the KSC. He has developed a reputation for incisive legal argument, both orally and in writing. According to the legal directories "*his knowledge of the case law concerning the principal international tribunals is as good as that of any of the best practitioners*".

Joe has also led several Rule of Law projects globally. His work has an emphasis on supporting emerging states transitioning to democracy from the traumas of conflict or autocracy. He has held leadership roles on UK FCDO multi-year projects in Somaliland, Kosovo and the Maldives. He also directed several projects supporting domestic prosecution authorities and civil society to pursue accountability for war crimes in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and South Sudan.

He is dual-qualified before the Bars of England and Wales and New York.

Notable Cases

Extradition

Joe has a growing extradition practice, in the Westminster Magistrates Court and the High Court, which has included in the last 12 months:

- French extradition request to serve a sentence for membership of a gang involved in the "small boats crossings".
- Romanian on appeal involving a number of leading points concerning Romanian domestic law: "deliberate absence", the compliance of Romanian retrial rights with section 20 of the Extradition Act 2003, and the consistency of the newly enacted Romanian "offence of fugitivity" with the principle of specialty.
- Polish appeal concerning the impact of delay in certifying the arrest warrant on Article 8 rights.
- Hungarian appeal arguing an error of law in the assessment of the relevance of delay in an Article 8 assessment.
- Polish appeal concerning specialty, fugitivity and passage of time (section 14).
- Hungarian appeal concerning Article 8 (medical grounds).

Extradition

Kosovo

Specialist Prosecutor v Isni Kilaj

Defending the former Mayor of Malisheve in a five-handed contempt trial which includes the former President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi.

Kosovo Specialist Chambers

Serbia

Prosecutor v Jovica Stanišić

Acted for the Head of Serbian Intelligence throughout his trial and appeal in the first full retrial in international criminal litigation (arguing novel points of law such as the application of ne bis in idem). Defended expansive theory of joint criminal enterprise between the Belgrade, Croatian and Bosnian Serbs.

International Residual Mechanism for International Tribunals

Prosecutor v Ratko Mladić

Represented the head of the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) defending allegations of genocide including in relation to the Srebrenica massacre.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

Myanmar

In the matter of the Rohingya Deportation

Seminal case concerning the extent of the ICC's territorial jurisdiction over non-state parties. Drafted successful legal submissions, on behalf of 400 women and girls, successfully arguing for an extended application of the court's territorial jurisdiction to the deportation of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar (a non-state party to the ICC) to Bangladesh (a state party).

International Criminal Court

Rwanda

Prosecutor v Alphonse Nteziryayo (“Butare”)

Prepared the appeal at the conclusion of the longest criminal trial in history. 30 year sentence overturned.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Prosecutor v Aloys Ntabakuze (“Military I”)

Represented the leader of the Rwandan Government Forces’ Paracommando Battalion. Assisted in the drafting of the final trial brief. Prepared subsequent appeal and drafted interlocutory motions. Life sentence vacated and substituted.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Prosecutor v Hassan Ngeze (“Media”)

Acted for the editor of *Kangura* magazine, in his appeal hearing in the seminal case determining criminalisation of speech and conspiracy to commit genocide. Life sentence vacated and substituted.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Sierra Leone

Prosecutor v Morris Kallon (“RUF”)

Defended the 2i/c of the Revolutionary United Front, a guerrilla militia seeking to overthrow the government of President Ahmed Kabbah. Kallon was accused of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. Lead drafter of the final trial brief, summarising and commenting upon four years of evidence.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

View International

International Investigations

From 2016-2023, Joe was partner at Global Rights Compliance LLP and Treasurer of Global Rights Compliance Foundation, a niche conflict-related accountability practice. Joe was one of three partners who oversaw GRC’s growth to over a hundred staff and contractors. He led many areas of organisational growth: finance, human resources, operations and logistics, risk management, bid writing and business development.

As partner, he led multiple projects supporting domestic prosecuting authorities to investigate allegations of war crimes.

Ukraine

- Operational Lead, "**Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA)" – "Mobile Justice Teams**" component. Partner responsible for the operational and logistical set up of the MJTs, teams of lawyers, investigators and military experts to support the Prosecutor General's Office's investigation of war crimes in Ukraine.
- Legal Expert, "**Supporting Ukraine's Capacity to Prosecute War Crimes in Crimea and Donbas**" (NL MFA). Provided technical advice to Ukrainian war crimes prosecutors on various aspects of conflict-related investigations and prosecutions, including the development of a multi-year prosecutorial strategy;

Iraq

- Project Director, "**Advancing ISIS Accountability In Iraq and Syria**" (US State Dept). Supported by the Free Yezidi Foundation to investigate ISIS war crimes cases in preparation for universal jurisdiction prosecutions in Europe;
- Project Director, "**The Counter-Terrorism Legislative Rapid Response Project**" (Counter-Terrorism Bureau, US State Dept). Lead the novel rapid reaction task force of legal experts advising on the enactment, amendment and implementation of CT legislation in multiple host states.

Public Law

Cardiff City Football Club v William McKay, Mark McKay, Janis McKay [2025] EWHC 1439 (Comm.)

Represented football agent Willie McKay in contempt of court proceedings brought by Cardiff City Football Club concerning the death of Argentinian Emeliano Sala. The contempt allegations arose out a claim between Cardiff City and FC Nantes (damages approximately €120 million) in commercial court proceedings in France. The issue concerned the scope of without prejudice privilege.

Business and Property Courts in Wales, High Court (Circuit Commercial Court)

Advising a foreign national who is the victim of intimidation in the UK (transnational repression) by a large foreign corporation.

The Baha Mousa Public Inquiry

Assisted Michael Topolski QC, (now HH Topolski KC), represented Core Participant Donald Payne, the first British soldier to be convicted of a war crime (inflicting inhumane treatment). The Inquiry, before Gage LJ, concerned the handling of civilian detainees during Operation Telic II in Basra in 2003.

Public International Law

Rule of Law

From 2018-2021, Joe led the Rule of Law portfolio at Axiom International (now TAG Ltd).

Provided leadership and quality assurance across Axiom's security and justice portfolio, including programmes in Afghanistan, Somalia and Nigeria.

Rule of law projects have included:

Maldives

Team Leader, **"Maldives Security and Justice Programme"**

Integrated Security Framework / FCO

Lead multi-disciplinary of experts (justice, police, prisons) deployed on behalf of the FCDO to address the causes of corruption and terrorism in the Maldives. Also served as Criminal Justice Adviser to the British High Commissioner in the Maldives, (advising on matters of human rights and counter-terrorism).

Kosovo

Technical Director, **"Strengthening the Integrity of the Kosovo Justice System"**

FCDO/ CSSF 2018-2021

Providing technical direction of the scoping, design and delivery of large anti-corruption project commissioned on behalf of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Somaliland

Lead Consultant, **Somaliland Security and Justice Reform Programme**, CSSF, 2016-2020

Co-designed justice component of this multi-strand four-year security and stabilisation programme. Trained prosecutors and judges. Developed new bespoke case management system.

Lead Consultant, **Somaliland Counter-Terrorism Project**, CSSF, 2018-2019.

Co-designed comprehensive training programme for judges and prosecutors handling counter-terrorism cases.

Rule of Law

Achievements

Memberships

- IBA
- CBA
- New York State Bar Association
- Association des Avocats de la Defense (association of defence attorneys before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)
- JUSTICE

Appointments

- State of New York, Attorney. Passed the Bar exams in 2007. Licensed to practise in the New York State and Federal jurisdictions in the USA.
- Axiom International Ltd, Senior Justice Reform Advisor. Axiom International provides expert services in the defence, policing, criminal justice and forensic sciences sectors. Joe is regularly deployed as a subject-matter expert in criminal justice to consult on and implement institution and capacity-building projects in developing jurisdictions.
- Global Rights Compliance LLP, Legal Consultant. GRC provides advice to Governments, corporations and NGOs on matters of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, transitional justice and business and human rights.

Publications

- Co-author of Call to Arms, International Bar Association North American Forum Regional Newsletter, 2013
- International Criminal Justice?, Criminal Law and Justice Weekly, 2012
- The Third International Defense Conference - International Criminal Justice: Justice for Whom?,

Criminal Bar Quarterly, 2012

- Assisted Suicide – the Case for Reform, Criminal Law and Justice Weekly, 2012
- Weighing up the Evidence, with Fulford LJ., (then President of the Trial Division of the International Criminal Court), Counsel, (May 2010).

Training and Speaking

- International Bar Association, War Crimes Committee, Annual Conference, Peace Palace, The Hague (forthcoming)
- Association of Defence Counsel before the ICTY Training, The Hague
- Designs and delivers bespoke training programmes for judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers in Hargeisa, Somaliland

Education

- BVC, College of Law
- LPC, Nottingham Law School
- BA Law with European Law, University of Nottingham
- Diploma en Derecho Espanol, Universitat de Valencia

Recognition

"Joe is composed on his feet and conducts his examinations in chief in an assured manner. His written advocacy is compelling and incisive, and his knowledge of the case law concerning the principal international tribunals is as good as that of any of the best practitioners."

Chambers UK, 2023

"He demonstrates flawless judgement on a daily basis but is appealingly modest with it."

Chambers UK, 2023

“A smart, focused and thorough junior. He cuts through legal problems like a knife through butter.”

Legal 500, 2023

"Has encyclopaedic knowledge of international criminal law and procedure. He is very good on his feet and a joy to work with."

Chambers UK, 2022

“He is a powerhouse in International law. Seldom have I seen anyone of his call with such a touch and flair for the law, one who knows how to apply it skilfully and with precision and optimum impact.”

Legal 500, 2021

"An impressive advocate, who is very calm and collected. It is difficult to ruffle him and he is second to none when it comes to black-letter law."

Chambers UK, 2021

"An excellent young lawyer, who is hard-working, dedicated and ambitious." "He focuses on the detail and is determined to get to the right legal answer."

Chambers UK, 2021

"Absolutely wonderful. He has a fantastic legal mind and an encyclopaedic knowledge of international criminal law and procedure. His written advocacy is second to none."

Chambers UK, 2020

"He cuts to the heart of complex cases"

Legal 500, 2020

'His ability to spot legal problems and work around or through them is second to none"

Legal 500, 2018

"He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of international criminal law and his advocacy is very persuasive."

Legal 500, 2017