

Press Release

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Carter-Ruck

Penguin Books apologises and pays damages to former chief MOD Legal Adviser over Shami Chakrabarti book

Penguin Books Ltd today apologised to Martin Hemming CB, the former Director General of Legal Services in the Ministry of Defence, before Mr Justice Warby in the High Court in London.

The court heard that a book with the borrowed title "On Liberty", written by Shami Chakrabarti and published by Penguin, had contained untrue allegations to the effect that Mr Hemming had used his position in Government to silence legitimate concerns relating to allegations of serious human rights abuses on the part of the British military and had threatened and briefed against a senior officer who wished to express those concerns. Ms Chakrabarti also unjustifiably described Mr Hemming as a 'Company Man', words she applied elsewhere in the book to an individual who she identified as an apologist for torture.

Mr Hemming's solicitor, Cameron Doley told the court that the allegations made by Ms Chakrabarti were entirely without foundation. Mr Hemming had never attempted to silence legitimate concerns relating to human rights abuses and he had not threatened or briefed against the officer in question. He had, furthermore, certainly never conducted himself in any way that could possibly justify the epithet 'Company Man' in the extremely prejudicial meaning ascribed to those words by Ms Chakrabarti in her book.

Yinka McKay, solicitor for Penguin, confirmed what the court had been told by Mr Doley and apologised to Mr Hemming for the offence and distress caused by the allegations. She indicated that the offending passages would be removed from all future editions of the book and that an undertaking had been given not to repeat the allegations in future. Mr Hemming was also to receive the payment of damages and his legal costs under the terms of settlement.

Speaking today, Mr Hemming said:

"It was devastating for me to read these false allegations and to have both my professionalism and integrity attacked in Ms Chakrabarti's book. I tried to speak with Ms Chakrabarti after the book was published in order to put her right but she would not even meet with me. She thereby left me with no choice but to go down the legal route.

I am hugely relieved and pleased that Penguin has now done the decent thing and withdrawn the allegations and apologised.

I understand that, when she had extracted an expression of regret from Andy Burnham after threatening to sue him a few years ago, Ms Chakrabarti issued a statement in which she expressed the hope that he and others would "remember the value of treating fellow human beings with dignity and respect in future." I hope that Ms Chakrabarti may reflect on those sentiments in the light of today's events.

For further information please contact Cameron Doley (cameron.doley@carter-ruck.com) on 020 7353 5005.