



Journalist Fellowship Paper

# Beyond the battlefield: rethinking the journalist-PR dynamic in modern media

By **Ton van der Ham**

December 2023

Michaelmas Term

Sponsor: Zembla & BNNVARA

# Preface

This report was prepared by investigate journalist Ton van der Ham. It is the product of a three-month industry-sponsored fellowship at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, funded by Zembla & BNNVARA.

BNNVARA is a broadcasting association and network within the Dutch public broadcasting system. It produces the documentary programme, Zembla, which investigates abuses in society, profiles persons of interest, monitors social developments and provides background to current events.

Ton has worked as an investigative journalist on Zembla for the past 16 years.



*Photo: Henriette Guest*

Despite both working in the field of communications, journalists and press relations officers are not easy bed fellows. We stand armed on opposite sides of the public interest field, ready to open fire respectively with tough questions or carefully worded press statements that may prove to be direct hits or blanks fired. When the gunpowder clears, there's a winner and – inevitably – a loser.

As George Orwell put it: “Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed; everything else is public relations.”

It all sounds so captivating and adventurous, doesn't it? But grand metaphors and cliches often fail to capture the nuance of reality.

Strained relationships with spokespeople can compromise the quality of journalism. A lack of trust from spokespeople results in suboptimal reporting, depriving citizens of the stories they deserve. Executives, companies, and their press departments seem increasingly caught up in image creation, all vying to score points. Journalists think PRs prevaricate and conceal; PRs think we're biased and muckraking for attention. Mutual distrust is high. Who truly emerges as the winner in this scenario?

In the 16 years I've worked as an investigative journalist for Zembla, I've engaged in my fair share of battles with PRs. One even had me arrested in a hospital lobby. (More on that later.)

It's crucial to recognise that journalists and PRs should not be close allies. The strained relationship between the press and PR is a historical issue, and journalists should maintain a healthy distance from those in power. In a world marked by inflated egos, diffuse political interests, and deceptive rhetoric, journalists serve as a counterforce. There is no role in the world for friendly watchdogs.

But when distance turns into ignorance, we all have a problem. Without trust, you cannot build and maintain a professional relationship. And like it or not: press and PRs cannot ignore each other.

It was with this dilemma weighing on my mind that I left for Oxford, and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, at the end of 2021: could press and PRs work together more constructively?

### **An interview with the director**

Across the channel, in a Victorian villa on a leafy street near the centre of Oxford sits the Reuters Institute. Here, scientists and journalists from all over the world conduct research on issues such as press freedom, trust in journalism and the influence of social media.

As a brand-new journalist fellow, it was with some trepidation that I told the institute's director, Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, about my project plan. Would he think my pursuit of better relations was far too soft... inappropriate?

"I think it is brave of you as a journalist to be open to this discussion without resorting to the illusion that the interests are identical," he told me. "They have different interests and different ideals. The relationship is necessarily adversarial, but it doesn't have to be antagonistic. You don't have to be enemies. Everyday PR professionals are working to make journalists' lives easier."

He also recognised that an expanding cadre of corporate and public communication specialists were making it increasingly difficult for journalists to put hard questions to those in power. This, he said, increases the risk that journalism would fail to "contribute to a better understanding of the complexity and nuances of public issues".

In his role as director, Nielsen is often sought out for comment by the press. For this reason, he is uniquely placed to empathise with the frustrations on both sides. "Almost everyone who has been in the media experiences what one scholar described to me as 'the shock of non-recognition'." He's describing the moment,

after giving clear and expert comment, that you see the final report and don't recognise an accurate reflection of yourself.

“Our identity is one of the most intimate and personal things we have and, at the same time we have no control over it – because it is in the eye of the beholder. If you get negative coverage than you have both this disquieting sense that this is not quite who you are, and it is not quite what you have said, and the sense that you are essentially being violated a bit by being represented in a way that you don't feel is genuine, fair, or accurate. And this is not about factual accuracy, and it is not about right or wrong; it is a much more basic feeling that you have been shown to the world as somebody other than you think you are. That is quite uncomfortable.”

Given this perspective, it becomes understandable why press departments are inclined to shield their leaders from what they perceive as unfair, disingenuous, or potentially even violent publicity. As Nielsen aptly puts it: “The more you have to lose when you are misrepresented, the more controlling you want to be.”

According to Nielsen, few journalists are open to the idea that they don't always give powerful people a fair hearing. Indeed, this is an uncomfortable thought: journalists try to capture reality, but our choice of quote, our framing, can never be entirely objective. “You can imagine the frustration of the suspicion that your stories are misleading because of a lack of nuance,” he said.

Nor is the interview a timeless thing that has always existed: Nielsen recounts that European journalists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were astonished to learn from Americans that politicians could be questioned. “That was unheard of. What you did was you waited for the politicians to tell you what they thought, rather than you going to them, and actually talking to them.”

But there is no legal requirement that politicians, CEOs, or members of the public should agree to answer our questions. It's not in any constitution; it's a norm, a convention. “And conventions can change,” Nielsen warned. “We take for granted that people will talk to journalists, but actually, it is increasingly amazing that they do so – especially when they are not politicians.”

A politician needs public attention: he must be seen as accessible and accountable to retain votes, so is more likely to agree to a request for comment or interview. But executives and experts are far less incentivised to do.

“Take the CEOs of the major tech companies,” Nielsen said. “It is exceedingly rare that they talk to a journalist.” This erosion of the independent journalistic interview worries him. “It is a troubling for those who believe journalism has a really important role in bringing to light what is happening and holding power to account,” he said.

For all our shortcomings, journalists' ability to interview powerful people plays an imperfect but important role in our societies. It would be a shame to see this role weakened by a deterioration of civil engagement with PRs.

In one of Oxford's magnificent libraries, I read an article with the tantalising title: [Why democracies need an unlovable press](#).<sup>1</sup> According to the author, Michael Schudson, journalism has the "anarchic potential" to disrupt the carefully constructed image of senior political figures at unpredictable moments.

He thinks this is a good thing: because it serves democracy that those in power – despite their army of communications professionals – cannot manage us. Being "unlovable" is then almost a certificate of good behaviour. Does this sound like a licence for the press to mercilessly judge everyone? I'm sure PRs have other thoughts. And so I asked.

### Interviews with 'the enemy'

With all the ambition of Dutch polder, I set out to speak to as many PRs from the Netherlands as possible. My transcripts represent a sample of top communications professionals at ministries, banks, PR agencies and the National Information Service, among others.

In my book [Voorbij het wantrouwen](#) (Beyond Distrust), I have compiled eight of these interviews, including a probing conversation with the hospital spokesperson of the UMC Utrecht who had me arrested in 2018: my personal favourite example of how press and PR can collide.

During our reflective, self-critical conversations I was struck by how much fear and stress exists on the PR side. Investigative journalists, in particular, evoke anxiety and distrust. A mere telephone call can incite panic within many organisations. Uncertainty prevails as they grapple with questions of what sensitive information we may have gathered and whether they will be afforded a fair opportunity to present their side of the story.

My conversations with PRs revealed a prevalent belief that journalists are not interested in reporting nuance, or at least, "it feels that way".

Their perception is that we are biased, leading them to anticipate that our publication will oversimplify the complexities of whatever case is at hand. Consequently, as the shutters come down, the very imbalance in reporting they feared begins to unfold – a self-fulfilling prophecy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schudson, Michael: Why democracies need an unlovable press. *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009), Book Review 647-651

The fact that journalists sometimes record telephone conversations only serves to magnify their convulsions of fear. (We don't do this for fun, by the way, but because our records are required for both fact-checking and the resolution of disputes in legal proceedings.) Still, unannounced taping is not chic to them; it feels unsafe. And so, the increasingly ubiquitous and always maddening mantra is repeated: "Just pop your questions in an email." This is usually reciprocated with a meaningless statement that does not provide satisfactory answers to the essential questions.

In the rare case that an interview is granted, everyone is so on edge that no one is really satisfied afterwards. The minister "only has 10 minutes", and the team is worried about unanticipated "gotcha" questions, or sloppy editing that might distort their answers. These are not good conditions for an insightful interview. And so the public remains none the wiser.

They're stressed out by our deadlines, too. It often turns out to be extremely difficult for press officers to get all the relevant information in order internally. Relevant facts might be hidden in poorly searchable computer systems. It is not always unwillingness when a response takes a long time. They feel overloaded and pressured – especially when a journalist seems to have an information advantage because of their own sources.

And now, this is not always the case, but I do sometimes sense a lack of genuine curiosity on the other side. This is strange, because you would expect the information officer to be just as curious about the answers as the journalist who asked the critical questions. Especially, let's say, when they're asking about hushed up fatalities at a university medical centre.

Yet, during my investigation into wrongdoing at UMC Utrecht (the second largest hospital in the Netherlands), the board of directors and the communications department seemed not at all interested in *what* had been leaked, but *that* it had been leaked. Hospital lawyers were working overtime: how did Zembla get those surgery reports? Who had been talking to us? Meanwhile, patient safety was at stake, and doctors were in real fear of a tyrannical department head. Reputational damage control does nothing to improve the standard of healthcare.

By the same stroke, fear of reputational damage does not make the job of spokespeople any easier. One thing is certain: people in power are allergic to negative publicity. The modern obsession with curating a positive public image at all times deeply complicates the relationship between journalist and spokesperson.

### **Interviews with The Hague**

Ask around at The Hague itself, and you'll find public officials who think politicians have gone too far in the image-making game. That is certainly not only the fault of the public relations officer. As one of my interviewees, Steffart Buijs, who does

many interim jobs for the government, said: “We are an obliging people.” In other words: if the minister doesn’t want something to come out, it won’t happen.

In the age of cancel culture, image-obsessed politicians can hinder factual and complete information to press and parliament – because they know how quickly they might be sacrificed following a headline. Maryse Ducheine, the now departed communications director of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, observed: “It seems as if we no longer consider sharp journalism normal.” To be clear, she thinks this is a problem: “There is too much PR, too much what I call ‘empty visibility’, and there is a need for an active and in-depth discussion on the ethics of government communication.”

When I asked Ducheine how we could ensure that citizens are better informed, she offered an unfiltered critical assessment: “The reliability of government – and the reliability of information from that government – is under pressure from the dominance of partisan political profiling, among other things,” she said. She described the control of information as a business model, and social media as the turbo-driver of fuss. “The public interest could and should be more paramount.”

Openness – real openness – to the public is her prescription for the trouble at hand. “Don’t look at that headache of a press request as ‘Oy, this will get me into trouble; I don’t feel like it’. Yes, nasty articles will appear, but it’s better to be relaxed about that. And think carefully: how are we going to tell our story?”

Ducheine believes transparency starts at the top of the political pecking order, and puts the ball squarely in the Prime Minister’s court: “This is about exemplary behaviour and leadership.”

When those in power hold their spokespeople hostage to an unhealthy focus on reputation, the result is disingenuous communication. Society is not served by that.

Friso Fennema, director of the communications department at the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, remained a loyal public servant during his interview, but he did add: “I sometimes have the idea that we are a little too much like salesmen”. That bothers him, he said, “because we are there for society, not for selling the ideal picture.”

When journalists request government documents, they often receive them with information randomly redacted, arguing that these passages are personal policy views of civil servants and therefore do not need to be shared. Fennema and his colleagues seemed reluctant to engage in discussions about this uncomfortable practice. But why must we put up with a constant struggle to unveil information that is legally meant to be public? I found no answers to soothe my ire.



Currently, the Dutch government falls short in implementing confidence-building policies. The previous cabinet resigned amid a major scandal when the tax authorities wrongly labelled thousands as fraudsters, resulting in personal tragedies of skyrocketing debt and evictions. Investigative journalists played a crucial role in bringing to light the discriminatory approach and sheer scale of the folly. Ministers and their spokespersons reacted slowly, often in denial and concealment, adopting a defensive and reactive stance.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte promised us a “new culture of governance” with transparency as a central tenet, yet in practice, little progress is evident. Distrust and cynicism have grown under his new cabinet, with Rutte’s verbal agility aiding his political survival but eroding his credibility. When confronted with a lie (the comms team would rather say, “factual inaccuracy”), he claims to have “no active memory”. Sensitive text messages? He seems to have lost them.

The prime minister repeatedly evades accountability in parliament, leading critics to assert that open government remains an empty phrase.

I wanted to hear from PR strategists whether they understood why journalists felt increasing cynicism toward the lack of genuine disclosure. They said they got it – to an extent. But most found our scepticism irritating, insisting that many things go right in government, and not every mistake is intentional. They perceive journalists’ constant probing as professional insult.

At the National Information Service, a highly influential adviser has been on the job for years: Guido Rijnja. He told me: “Blacklining really has gone too far.” For integrity in government communication, he said, it is necessary for the spokesperson to feel safe, not only vis-à-vis a journalist, but also in his own organisation: “He should not have to constantly wonder: does my boss approve of this, won’t my minister get into trouble? There is a lot of uncertainty.”

He also offered this advice to his peers: “You have to avoid communication becoming a kind of policy repair – making something more ‘fun’, more ‘palatable’.” The credibility of government is undeniably at stake, and poor communication is a pivotal factor.

Roelof Janssens, corporate communications coordinator at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, is working out a plan on behalf of the national government to increase the visibility and credibility of public administration. The idea, he told me, is to give journalists (and thus, ultimately, citizens) a better understanding of what goes on in the departmental engine room.

“We want to put civil servants more forward in the media,” he said, to discuss policies and provide background on new plans. This approach aims to prevent misunderstandings based on a “limited view of reality”.

Of course, I would like to speak to more officials: both off and on the record. That is better than streamlined press releases and measured emails. At the same time, I wonder if officials are willing to take on this role. Many consciously choose to remain in the shadows to avoid backlash, angry stakeholders, and interference from political superiors.

Journalism and politics both benefit when information is less managed. But how feasible is that ambition when administrators are scurrying from crisis to crisis? Janssens et al might say with all sincerity that they want to put us in touch with civil servants to discuss new policy plans, but do we still get that conversation even if that memorandum meets with all sorts of objections from powerful advocacy groups? Or if we ask uncomfortable questions?

A recent example: in the spring of 2021, I prepared a segment about genetically modified crops. I examined the ways in which officials, scientists and industry try to influence the EU decision-making process. It's a sensitive subject.

Agriculture minister Piet Adema did not want to give an interview "at the moment", saying it would be better to wait for the European Commission's decision first.

However, his spokesperson did offer an off-the-record background interview with two officials in charge. What a surreal and tense meeting that was. Almost every question was evaded: "We don't have an opinion; the minister has an opinion".

### **Interviews with the private sector**

Certainly, much in the realm of communication functions smoothly, and you'll be hard-pressed to find press officers who don't recognise the significance of independent journalism. However, a pervasive atmosphere of distrust prevails, fuelled by implicit assumptions about each other's intentions and methods. The multitude of assumptions we harbour clouds the relationship, needlessly burdening it with unwarranted pressure.

The situation deteriorates further when a deliberate attempt is made to construct an adversarial image of journalists. This tactic introduces a poisonous element that permeates the rest of society. A clear instance of this happened after broadcasting a story about Rabobank's role in making agriculture more sustainable.

This bank is one of the largest financiers of conventional agriculture worldwide. They are a driver of the industrialisation of the agricultural sector, with all its problems such as declining biodiversity, depleted soils, and emissions of CO<sup>2</sup> and nitrogen. After my interview with Rabobank's sustainability director, Bas Rüter, he advised his followers on social media "not to believe every journalist who cuts and pastes at will".

The suggestion that I took quotes out of context held no merit. When I called him on it, he backtracked. “Touché,” he texted back, but the harm had already been done. He repeated this behaviour after European Commissioner Frans Timmermans urged the bank to write off toxic loans. Timmermans “didn’t mean that”, Rüter told the agricultural trade press. With a straight face, he claimed our direct quote of the EU Commissioner’s statement was a distortion by our outlet.

These low blows harm the reputation of investigative journalism, eroding our standing and influence. It makes it increasingly difficult to get interviewees to cooperate by unfairly reinforcing their fears. And it gives ammunition to those who had no desire to be transparent anyway. Rüter hands them a perfect argument: look, they cannot be trusted; they omit relevant quotes. This is dangerous rhetoric, peddled by populists – the “lamestream media” – seemingly on the rise and many times more offensive than being chased off a farm by an angry farmer who has bought into the trope.

For my Reuters project, I approached Rabobank’s director of communications, Leendert Bikker. Reflecting with him on the damaging statements of his fellow director, I could feel my anger rising. Bikker attempted to appease. His rule of thumb, he said, is: “Just tell the honest story. Don’t turn it into a contest.”

That’s a lovely sentiment, but not so easy to accept when PRs feel at liberty to take open fire on the messenger, ensuring the message does not get across at all. Increasingly, we experience spin doctors putting pressure on our sources – through legal proceedings like [SLAPPS](#), or otherwise – to cynically undermine our ability to gather the news.

### **Interview with an academic (and a king)**

At the Reuters Institute, I meet Professor Alfred Hermida. He had come over for a few months from Canada, where he is a professor at the School of Journalism, Writing, and Media at the University of British Columbia. Before entering academia, he worked in various leading positions at the BBC. Now an award-winning journalist and academic, Hermida knew the mores of mass media like no other.

He listened attentively to the outcomes of my conversations with the “other side”, then told me: “The fear factor – especially in the political context – is a significant finding. It is so frustrating: you can’t do your job properly, and they can’t do their job properly. That doesn’t really help anybody.”

In this way, the relationship between press and PR devolves into a tug-of-war: one can only win when the other loses. “This has been a perennial issue,” Hermida said, “but now it is accentuated because of the fear that anything you say can be used as a political weapon. So the question is: how do you open up in this context of a polarized society and these questions of trust?”

I opened my laptop and showed Hermida a video clip of myself in action: holding a Zembla microphone, I am preparing to “doorstep” the Dutch King Willem-Alexander. We had been investigating controversial art sales and shadowy financial moves by the House of Orange for months. What emerged was what seemed like a very lucrative deal with the tax authorities. We had also uncovered that the king was receiving millions in subsidies for Crown Estates Het Loo, a large nature reserve owned by the state, where he and his guests would hunt undisturbed in the autumn. We had been rebuffed with incorrect and incomplete statements. And so my camera operator and I find ourselves on the cold cobbles of Amsterdam’s Dam Square in the thick of winter, waiting to give King Willem-Alexander a last chance to answer.

As the King leaves the Nieuwe Kerk after performing some routine duties, I step forward: “Majesty, Ton van der Ham, Zembla.” We stand less than two metres apart.

Hermida looked up from the screen in surprise: “How approachable your king is!”

The scene continues. “Majesty, are you willing to be more forthcoming about your possessions?” The king says nothing and hurriedly gets into his Audi. I bend down and he looks straight into the camera for a moment.

Hermida had his verdict ready: “Such theatre!”

I objected: is this not the ultimate set of circumstances under which journalists should – to use Schudson’s words – let fly their “anarchist potential”?

Hermida burst into laughter. “What did the king say when you doorstepped him? Did he say anything useful?”

“No,” I conceded, “but this also provides a telling image: the monarch has no response to offer.”

“I know why you did it,” Hermida told me, “because it makes you more credible to the audience. But again: it’s theatre.”

I asked: “Do you have a problem with that?”

“Not necessarily. It depends on the issue, but it is overused in journalism, especially on TV,” Hermida counselled. He admitted, he would have aired the scene if he were my editor in chief: “It’s good television: you tried to get the answer, now you’re going to the top.” But while viewers might get a kick out of seeing a public broadcaster hound the king, the approach has a downside: it further strains the relationship with the State Information Service. That is the price we pay for “good television”.

I also showed Hermida a clip from earlier in the same episode: a PR-officer is struggling on the telephone to me. Information from the State Information Service

has turned out to be incorrect, and I confront her about it. “That’s.. that’s... I really can’t tell you anything about that,” she stammers. PRs find it extremely annoying to see this kind of conversation back on TV. Hermida understands their frustration. “It’s a cheap trick, used too quickly,” he said.

I countered: “I want to show how I get my information.”

But the professor shook his head: “This is not how you get your information, because you did not get your information. What I see is an unfortunate spokesperson who happened to pick up the phone. She is an easy target.”

“But Alfred, you yourself worked for TV for many years. She is not some junior spokesperson. She is involved and constantly sent me from pillar to post.”

“This is not about right or wrong,” Hermida said. “You can say: I am showing the public that I am doing my job, but you could also say: That Ton, he just won’t take no for an answer. He is a terrible person.”

I countered again: “I get paid to get the answers, or show that I don’t get them.”

And Hermida delivered his final verdict: “But they think: ‘he is just rude’, and they won’t trust you. With the king, there is a balance of power: he is a powerful figure. But a spokesperson does not have that much power. The question is: who told her not to give you the information? You are holding the wrong person to account. Mistrust will increase because you make them look stupid. I call this gotcha journalism.”

It is something to consider.

Although I do also wonder: who exactly is responsible for making this press officer look foolish? Are journalists to blame when authority figures and their press officers pay lip service to notions of transparency and open government? Any spokesperson worth their (well-paid) weight knows that they always speak to journalists on the record, unless explicitly agreed otherwise.

And is it not overly cynical to frame attempts to report as fully and transparently as possible – including coverage of non-transparent behaviour from the other side – as stoking distrust? “As long as they do not trust you because they are afraid you are out to catch them,” Hermida said, “they will not want to cooperate with you.”

Press and PR need to work harder to find common ground, according to Hermida. “You need to lower the stakes. Take a step back. Explain to them: ‘Look, we are doing this documentary anyway. I know you don’t like this, but it’s going to happen. Let’s talk about how I can try to represent your view in a way that you are comfortable with’.” This is how we go about rebuilding trust, Hermida said.

Of course, it remains the job of journalists to ask uncomfortable questions, and that will provoke resistance from parties who do not want to court negative publicity. As the “fourth estate”, we are not on earth to please PR officials. But our clout is really not undermined if we take a more critical look at our own role.

It is a search for a balance: do put your finger on the sore spot, but don't simplify the story or hype up drama. “Journalism as focused too much on conflict as a prevailing news value,” Hermida told me. “Actually, having conflicts does not always help the audience. It doesn't mean you don't want to hold government accountable – that is not the issue. It is more: does your audience deserve better?”

I asked Hermida why journalists are so interested in stories of conflict.

“Because then, you as a journalist, can be the shining knight who beats the evil politician. You can feel good about yourself, and feel that you are doing your job. But actually you are not – all you are serving is yourself and your colleagues. I see this all the time.”

### Interviews with integrity

The Reuters Institute took us journalist fellows to dinner at Balliol College one evening. It is one of Oxford's most prestigious and privileged campuses, where politicians like Boris Johnson spent their salad days.

After entering through the porter's lodge, we were led along fairytale corridors to a posh dining hall. It is not the kind of place journalists are typically welcomed into.

At the long table, I take my chance to engage Rasmus Kleis Nielsen in another conversation. We recall the old-school metaphor that the relationship between politician and journalist is like the relationship between a lamppost and a dog: it is the latter's role to piss on the former. Nielsen chuckles, but rebuts: “It is a very macho thing to say; it is rather self-aggrandizing.”

His view of what makes for good journalism is devoid of facile stereotyping and big words: “Providing people with relatively accurate, accessible, diverse, relevant, timely, independently produced information about social developments. That's what journalists can do for democracy.”

If I want to advocate for a better relationship between press and PRs, Nielsen told me, I will need to engage not only with spokespeople but also with my own colleagues. “Part of your mission will be to tell journalists: you can do better journalism if you do this differently.” I think he means: with a little less self-congratulation and bias. And preferably with a dose of sensitivity.

“Show empathy and recognise that the big, important things that journalists cover are hard – and are, in most situations, not simply right or wrong choices. Even

people who have done things wrongly – either morally or in terms of execution – very rarely did so in bad faith.”

He also has eloquent advice for spokespeople: “Take the time to find out which journalist does his independent work in a way that gives you confidence that you will be treated with respect when you reveal a little more of the complexity and nuance of the issues you are struggling with.”

That being said, it's crucial to include a significant caveat: while we aspire to collaborate reflectively and constructively, we must acknowledge the reality of a world where prime ministers with a pathological disregard for transparency casually delete text messages, sources live in fear of speaking out, and bank executives launch attacks on the free press. In such a landscape, there's no room for naivety.

And yet, through my experiences, I've come to understand that it's both possible and advantageous for journalists to be resilient to external pressures and actively pursue improved relations with the “dark side” – pardon, I mean to say: with our friends in the press information department. Ultimately, this revolves around principles of ethics and integrity: elements that cannot be imposed but must be embraced voluntarily. Change begins with oneself.