



Citation for Mr David Miliband

Doctor of Laws (LLD)

8 September 2023, 4.00pm

Vice-Provost, I have pleasure in presenting David Miliband, Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

David Miliband is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee, a global humanitarian aid, relief and development non-governmental organisation founded by Albert Einstein in 1933.

He oversees the IRC's humanitarian relief operations in more than 40 war-affected countries and its refugee resettlement and assistance programmes in 28 cities across the US. In the 10 years of his leadership, the IRC has expanded its ability to rapidly respond to humanitarian crises and meet the needs of an unprecedented number of people uprooted by conflict, war and disaster.

Before joining the IRC in 2013 David's distinguished political career here in the UK included three years as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, driving advancements in human rights and representing the UK throughout the world. In 2006, as Secretary of State for the Environment, he pioneered the world's first legally binding emissions reduction requirements.

His accomplishments have earned him a reputation, in former President Bill Clinton's words, as 'one of the ablest, most creative public servants of our time' and as an effective and passionate advocate for the world's uprooted and poor people.

As the son of refugees, David Miliband brings a personal commitment to the IRC's work. His parents, both from Polish-Jewish families, fled to Britain from Belgium during World War 2 and its aftermath. He said recently that his parents' experience in fleeing conflict and his decision to work with the IRC was a 'closing of the circle' and that his family story 'mirrors many of the circumstances that people are facing around the world today'.

Growing up in a home filled with fierce political debate, an early career in politics was perhaps inevitable. David gained a first class degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from the University of Oxford in 1987 and as a Kennedy Scholar, took an MSc in Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1989. He holds Honorary Doctorates from the New School (New York), from American University in Cairo and from the University of Pennsylvania; and is a Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

He began his career as a political analyst at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and then at the Institute for Public Policy Research. In 1994, aged 29, David became Tony Blair's Head of Policy and contributed to the Labour party's manifesto for the 1997 general election. Following Labour's victory in that election, he led the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, a position he held until 2001, when he was elected the Labour Member of Parliament for South Shields. David represented South Shields until 2013, when he resigned his seat to take up his post at the IRC in New York.

He has said that he joined the IRC with the idea that it 'should not be a sleeping giant, it should be a roused leader in the global humanitarian sector'. He has been as good as his word. During his time at the helm he has grown the IRC from a \$400m, slightly unknown organisation doing good work, to a \$1.5billion powerful agent of change.

He leads a staff of thousands, who include first responders, humanitarian relief workers, international development experts, health care providers and educators. Colleagues cite his extraordinary work ethic. Staff quickly become familiar with his mantra 'Effort in equals product out'. He leads by example, pushing for the best, putting in the hours and reminding his staff that 'every meeting counts, every opportunity contributes'.

One told us: 'He is a leader who makes everyone at the IRC feel very proud. He is constantly striving to do better for the people that the IRC serves – he faces issues head-on and says what needs to be said. His perspective is that the work is too important to not try our very best.'

David's strategy has been to position the IRC as thought leaders of the humanitarian sector, and he has spoken powerfully about the growing need for, and increasing dangers to, non-governmental organisations such as the IRC. He has called our time 'the Age of Impunity' – a time of retreat from the rule of law, when power is exercised without accountability and governments are in retreat from big global problems.

He has said: 'In politics the great thrill is that you can see the big picture, but the danger is you lose sight of the ground level. The great thing about working in an NGO is that you are confronted every day with the ground level – and the danger is you lose the big picture.' His role at the IRC, he says, is to focus on the individuals they are helping but also to 'think seriously about the systemic problems that are bringing people's lives to destruction'.

At UCL we recognise the hugely important work the IRC is doing in crisis-affected countries and David's commitment to delivering lasting impact. As a globally leading multi-disciplinary institution, UCL is committed to offering opportunities to researchers and students displaced by conflict and to help ensure that their work and opportunities are not lost. Through our longstanding partnership with the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara), we support academics who are in immediate danger, forced into exile, or the many who choose to continue working in their home countries despite serious risks.

In 2022 UCL set up the Academic Fellowship Scheme for academics fleeing warzones as part of a new joint funding stream with Cara. We are proud to have opened our doors

to thirteen academics from Ukraine when the war broke out there, and are grateful for the new ideas, energy and perspectives that they bring to our university.

In recognition of his achievements in helping some of the most marginalised people in the world, and of his commitment to tackling some of the most difficult problems in global politics, Vice-Provost, I have pleasure in presenting Mr David Miliband, Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.