

NICOLE WIDDERSHEIM

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Over 25 years of experience working at the intersection of foreign policy, human rights and national security challenges. Expert on US government processes. Diverse field experience in conflict zones and political crises ranging from Afghanistan and Cote d'Ivoire to South Sudan and Cambodia.

- Strategic thinker, results-oriented leader, experienced lobbyist
- Effective manager & designer of advocacy strategies for national security issues, democracy and human rights policies & programs
- Strong communicator & network builder

EXPERIENCE

Human Rights Watch

Deputy Director- Washington

April 2022- Present

Maintain deep expertise on human rights issues in key countries of focus while seeking to influence U.S. government policy to improve human rights under threat. Analyze U.S. government strategies, policies, diplomacy, legislation and budgets to seek positive change for human rights. Maintain vast network of senior policymakers, elected officials, congressional staff, international human rights defenders, and media contacts to inform, influence and advocate for human rights. Work with regional researchers and experts to analyze human rights trends, develop policy recommendations, and expose violations.

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Senior Policy Advisor- Washington

Center for the Prevention of Genocide

August 2019- April 2022

Developing and delivering policy recommendations for governments, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations and communities to prevent, respond and recover from mass atrocities. Advocating for early action on early warning indicators, drafting U.S. legislation, and developing training curriculums for international atrocity prevention training. Managing the organization of large public outreach and awareness-raising events.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Senior Human Rights Advisor & Atrocity Prevention Focal Point- Washington

Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG)

January 2014- August 2019

Creating and conducting atrocity prevention training for foreign service cadre, designing atrocity prevention and genocide recovery programs, providing human rights technical support to USAID field missions to promote and protect the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups, developing U.S. government policy and response options on atrocity-risk situations, and representing USAID within the inter-agency and with external actors.

The White House

Director for African Affairs, National Security Council- Washington, D.C.

May 2017- June 2018

Initiated and coordinated all U.S. policy on Sudan, South Sudan and central Africa. Prepared national security policy options and guidance for National Security Advisor, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and the President. Represented Africa policy issues within the Atrocity Prevention Board.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

OTI Country representative- Cote d'Ivoire

Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)

May 2013-January 2014

Managed OTI Cote d'Ivoire CITI (*Cote d'Ivoire Transition Initiative*). Lead strategic planning, program management and design with a particularly focus on justice infrastructure and governance. Supported the establishment and organization of the “Special Investigative Cell” on crimes committed during the post-electoral conflict.

OTI Country Representative- Mali

April 30th- May 30, 2013

Managed the OTI Mali Transition Initiative during a start-up phase, designing reconciliation election-oriented and countering violent extremism activities for northern Mali.

OTI Country Representative- Haiti

June 2010- November 2012

Directed and managed a \$132 million recovery and transitional assistance program in Haiti for USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives.

Oxfam International

Head of UN Policy Office- New York City

November 2008 – June 2010

Led and managed Oxfam International’s (OI) representation to the United Nations and the Security Council on all humanitarian policy issues including political crises and disasters. Humanitarian Policy Lead for the entire 14-affiliate network, with authorization responsibilities on all humanitarian messaging, public and private, multi-media outlets. Represented Oxfam in the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect.

Humanitarian Policy Advisor- New York City

October 2007- November 2008

USAID

OTI Global Field Advisor- Kenya, Somalia, Washington, D.C.

November 2006 – September 2007

OTI Field Advisor/Country Representative- Sudan

June 2006-August 2006

Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) Protection Advisor- Darfur, Sudan

February 2005 to March 2006

International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq Out-of-Country Voting Program

Director of Operations-Sub-Office- Irvine, California

January 2005-February 2005

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Deputy Director of Government Relations- Washington, D.C.

June 2001 to September 2003

Registered lobbyist; advocated on behalf of refugees, refugee resettlement, humanitarian disaster issues and the foreign operations and appropriations bills. Produced media products and represented IRC positions on radio, TV and in print.

Emergency Response Field Coordinator- Malakal, Sudan

April 2000 to March 2001

Emergency Response Officer- Ethiopia

March-April 2000

Program Officer for Southern Sudan - Kenya

September 1998 – March 2000

Government Relations Associate - Washington, D.C.

December 1996- September 1998

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX, Colchester, United Kingdom

M.A. in Theory and Practice of Human Rights, September 2004

OXFORD UNIVERSITY, Oxford, United Kingdom, Refugee Studies Centre

Certificate in Forced Migration Studies, July 2002

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY, Kent, Ohio

B.A. in International Relations & African Studies, May 1996, Cum Laude

ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY, Nairobi, Kenya, Fall Semester 1995

PUBLICATIONS

'My Friend was Murdered by Political Violence too'

Newsweek, 7/14/2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/my-friend-was-murdered-political-violence-too-opinion-2097398>

'Joe Biden Isn't Doing Enough to Empower Women in World Diplomacy'

The Hill, 6/23/2024, <https://thehill.com/opinion/4733444-joe-biden-isnt-doing-enough-to-empower-women-in-world-diplomacy/>

'You're Forgetting Some Witnesses, Mr. Chairman"

The Hill, 5/3/2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/congress-blog/3986714-youre-forgetting-some-witnesses-mr-chairman/>

'Why Say Who Did What? The Ethiopia Case and The Power of US Atrocity Determinations'

Just Security, 7/20/2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/87320/why-say-who-did-what-the-ethiopia-case-and-the-power-of-us-atrocity-determinations/>

SKILLS

- English native speaker, Intermediate French, Beginner Kiswahili, Experience with Arabic
- Active Security Clearance-level available upon request
- Experienced program developer and manager of outcomes in human rights programming
- Well-versed and experienced in public speaking, including live T.V., Radio and panel events, managing media actors, facilitation of large group strategic planning and team-building
- Trained and extensively experienced in media skills, interviewing techniques and message development for various live audiences: Live interviews conducted with CNN, ABC, FOX, Al Jazeera and with print media and international radio outlets