

Alumni Profile - Akaash Maharaj

PPE, ST EDMUND HALL, 1990



My academic and practical experience of politics at Oxford left me with a profound sense that – while it is increasingly unfashionable to say so – there can be both honour and nobility in public service.

Like generations of PPE students, my perspectives on the philosophical relationship between power and the public good was shaped by the writings of Isaiah Berlin. Like many people with a passion for the practical advancement of pluralism, I was taken with the example of Roy Jenkins.

Towards the end of my degree, I was elected [President of the Oxford University Student Union \(OUSU\)](#), and spent much of my year in office combatting a government bill that sought to limit the ability of student unions to comment on national affairs. Isaiah Berlin, then at Wolfson College, agreed to serve as my Senior Member Advisor; Roy Jenkins, then the University's Chancellor and Leader of the Liberal Democrats in

the House of Lords, agreed to serve as my native guide through the legislative system.

After a year of effort by students across the country, the government bill was eviscerated, and the Secretary of State for Education was dismissed from Cabinet.

Since then, my life has meandered in many directions. I worked in the corporate sector, long enough to discharge my student loans and to understand of how private interests can nourish or cannibalise the public interest. I spent a few years as a [national athlete](#) and as [head of my country's equestrian team](#), and witnessed both the human form and institutional ethics being pushed beyond sane limits in the Olympic movement.

Today, I serve as [CEO of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption \(GOPAC\)](#), an international institution of legislators working together to combat corruption, strengthen democracies, and uphold the rule of law. Much of my work centres on prosecuting crimes against humanity and on reconciliation between post-conflict states.

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Looking back on my time at Oxford, I am astonished by the embarrassment of intellectual riches that that my friends and I enjoyed, and by the degree to which we took it for granted.

Studying PPE at Oxford was a seminal experience in all our lives. It helped us to believe that the world could be a more humane and more just place. It imparted to us a sense of responsibility to advance that dream. And it gave us the most extraordinary opportunities to work towards making that dream a reality.

