

Overview

While the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in late summer 2021 signaled the end of a U.S. military presence in that country, it didn't end heroic interventions of some Americans and other international counterparts. One such American group is Haas Communications client [DeliverFund](#), a nonprofit that fights human trafficking. The organization sought the aid of principal Christine Haas for strategic media guidance as international coordination of "Operation Soccer Balls" – a massive rescue attempt of the Afghan girls' soccer team – began. The coalition also included other humanitarian groups, U.S. military and intelligence officials and allies, U.S. Sen. Chris Coons and former Bush administration official Robert McCreary.

The assistance request came to DeliverFund, which had been fighting for the safety of Afghan women and girls and provided housing to 50 Afghan families in the U.S., from the captain of the Afghanistan



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Afghanistan girls soccer team given asylum in Portugal

BY ALEX SANZ
Sep 21, 2021

The girls on Afghanistan's national soccer team were anxious. For weeks, they had been moving around the country, waiting for word that they could leave.

One wants to be a doctor, another a movie producer, others engineers. All dream of growing up to be professional soccer players.

women's national soccer team in Canada. Despite the Taliban's attempts to reassure Afghans and the rest of the world that they would keep women's rights intact in the country, many others, including the captain and DeliverFund, knew otherwise. The Taliban had already [announced](#) that women would not be allowed to play sports. Nonetheless, Operation Soccer Ball had to include Taliban coordination.

To add to the challenges, the rescue had to accommodate not just the 26 soccer team players, but other children and adults, including infants – a total of 80 people – with a mere three-hour window to accomplish it.

With timing of the utmost importance, and lives literally at stake, Haas Communications had to navigate a balance of media attention with weeks of clandestine activities, earning their client media

coverage in a field of other unquestionably worthy, visible players and competing events. Starting with the highly reputable [Associated Press](#), the result was international coverage, including features of DeliverFund's role.

Client Information

Dallas-based [DeliverFund](#) is a nonprofit intelligence organization that leverages cutting-edge technology in the fight against human trafficking in the United States. Its International Human Trafficking Analysis Center (iHTAC) serves as the central all-source, shared knowledge bank on trafficking activity, human traffickers and their networks. It is the central dissemination and coordination point for law enforcement, select nonprofits and other professionals working to end modern-day slavery. Founded by former Navy Seal Jeremy Mahugh and CIA and Air Force veteran Nic McKinley, the 501(c)3 organization also provides subject-matter expertise in victim restoration services.



Challenges & Goals

With a high-profile and dangerous situation bound to get international attention despite the rescue's outcome, Haas Communications faced two primary challenges:

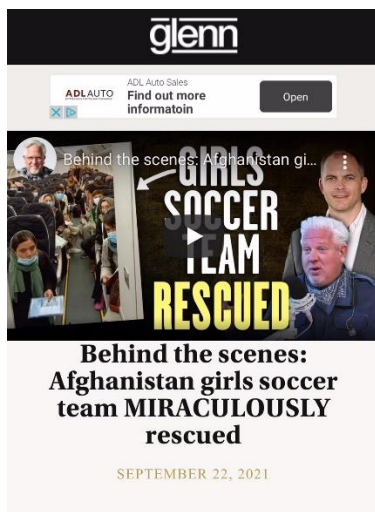
- Timing – balancing secrecy and media coverage
- Crisis – developing crisis communications plan and media training for their client
- Client coverage – getting her client a balance of media coverage commensurate with their role in the field of other high-profile and critical international players involved in the operation

The situation demanded balancing the delicate timing of preserving the necessary secrecy of planning and executing the rescue operation attempts with “breaking” the information to the right media contact within a media organization that would serve as a worldwide mouthpiece – at just the right time – while gaining her client some coverage in a crowded field of players and events.

Haas Communications was also acutely aware that much could go wrong, either with the rescue operation itself or with a leak to the media. This necessitated a crisis communications plan including media training for DeliverFund spokespersons.

Approach

Haas Communications principal Christine Haas knew that the fastest way to maximize coverage with the greatest speed was to get it into the hands of the Associated Press, which “feeds” other outlets around the world. As a trusted, independent, non-profit global news organization, AP is known for its balanced and factual reporting. The right AP contact was critical for this mission, which is where Christine's experience as an investigative journalist came into play. She also had to make sure her client was prepared with messages suited to any outcome scenario, and that they came across as one of the many key players involved in the operation.



Results

Haas Communications was able to get AP to be the first to break the story of soccer team's successful rescue and their asylum in Portugal. Several top-tier and localized outlets soon followed. All stories included mentions of DeliverFund, including a [feature](#) in the founders' home state of Montana. Principal Christine Haas was also able to secure two separate interviews on Glenn Beck's radio show – one remote and one in-studio – for DeliverFund co-founder and spokesperson Nic McKinley. Additionally, despite several failed (and

publicized) rescue attempts prior to the successful rescue, the secrecy surrounding the final, successful attempt remained intact.



Some examples of the coverage:

<https://apnews.com/article/soccer-immigration-sports-portugal-professional-soccer-b2097da4ac6ba491b31ffc2431091d3>

<https://newstalk955.com/the-montana-vets-behind-operation-soccer-balls-in-afghanistan/>

<https://nypost.com/2021/09/22/afghanistan-girls-soccer-team-given-asylum-in-portugal/>

<https://www.glennbeck.com/radio/behind-the-scenes-afghanistan-girls-soccer-team-miraculously-rescued>

<https://people.com/politics/afghan-girls-soccer-team-successfully-rescued-asylum-portugal/>



About Haas Communications

Haas Communications was founded by veteran news anchor and investigative reporter, Christine Haas, with the mission of being THE premier marketing and communications agency, applying results-driven strategies to help clients achieve their most ambitious marketing goals and communications objectives. With her extensive background as an investigative reporter and on-camera experience, Christine quickly rose to become one of the most sought-after media training professionals in the country. Christine also leads the Haas Communications team as they offer strategic public relations services, media relations counsel, broadcast interview training and presentation coaching to a wide variety of clients around the world.