



Melissa Fleming

Topics

Activism and Social Justice, Common Reads/FYE, Communication, Global Affairs, TED Talks

Travels From

Switzerland

Bio

Melissa Fleming is Head of Communications and Chief Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), working to draw attention, drive empathy, and generate support for the world's 65 million refugees and displaced people. She uses strategic communications to reach target audiences that include media, public, governments, and refugees themselves. She leads global media outreach and campaigns and operates multi-media news and feature service. From October 2016 to April 2017, she served as Senior Advisor to UN Secretary General António Guterres on his Transition Team. She is a champion for public communication through social media, including on her own Twitter account @melissarfleming. She also leads an innovative multi-media production team producing refugee stories of survival and resilience. She writes a regular column for *The Guardian* and is a contributor to UNHCR's blog. Melissa is also a frequent contributor for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and NPR. To garner support for a humanitarian cause, she believes communications must not only inform but also generate empathy and stir action. Melissa Fleming believes in the power of

public speaking to move audiences. Her TED talk, *Let's help refugees thrive, not just survive*, has been viewed over one million times around the world and has been subtitled in 28 languages. Over 1.5 million people watched her second TED talk about an extraordinary young Syrian woman who, with the baby she saved, was one of the only survivors of a boat wreck that killed 500 refugees, including her fiancé. She has since written a book on the story, *A Hope More Powerful than the Sea*, that was published in the US and UK in January 2017 and later in several other countries. In February 2018, *A Hope More Powerful Than the Sea* received an Alex Award at the ALA Midwinter Awards for one of the best adult books that appeals to teens.

Prior to working for the UNHCR, Melissa Fleming served eight years as Spokesperson and Head of Press & Public Information at the International Atomic Energy Agency during the period the organization made headlines for its inspection work in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. Prior to IAEA, she headed the Press & Information team at the Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe.

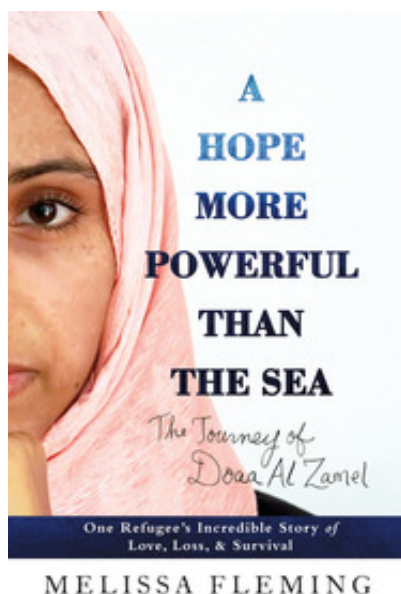
Melissa Fleming holds a master's degree in journalism from Boston University and a B.A. from Oberlin College. She began her career as a journalist, then worked as a public affairs specialist with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

SPEECHES

The Refugee Experience Melissa analyzes the current influx of refugees from war torn areas into Europe and presents personal accounts of such experiences. As one of the world's leading experts on refugees, Melissa effectively educates and moves audiences on these humanitarian issues.

BOOKS

[A HOPE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE SEA](#)



One Refugee's Incredible Story of Love, Loss, and Survival

Flatiron Books

Emotionally riveting and eye-opening, *A Hope More Powerful Than the Sea* is the incredible story of a young woman, an international crisis, and the triumph of the human spirit.

HARDBACK

REVIEWS: Praise for *A Hope More Powerful Than The Sea* "Fleming deftly illustrates the pain of those who choose to leave Syria... [She] recounts their narrative with compassion and without melodrama, and her book is ultimately a story of hope... The message is to try to humanize one young woman, to tell her tale so that the migrant crisis does not become a bunch of nameless, faceless people fleeing a war but human beings with families, with needs, and with desires."

— *Newsweek*

"Melissa Fleming's tale of a young Syrian woman's search for peace and safety is a book written for our times. On every page, loss and hope tangle. On every page, the human toll of the worst humanitarian crisis of our time is painfully, heartbreakingly brought home. This is an emotional read, at times painful, but it is above all a poignant tribute to hope, to resilience, and to the capacity for grace and generosity that dwells deep in the human heart."

— Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner* and *And the Mountains Echoed*

"I think Melissa Fleming is one of the most important people in the world. As the world's foremost advocate for refugees, she has worked tirelessly to put a human face on the greatest crisis of our time. There is no more important calling than this. Millions have been displaced by the wars in Iraq and Syria, and their situation is desperate. Yet everyone who has worked with refugees is amazed by their resilience and spirit. There is no better way to demonstrate this spirit than with the power of a single story. Melissa has found that story. The story of Doaa is dramatic, riveting, and ultimately hopeful. *A Hope More Powerful Than The Sea* provides a portrait of the refugee crisis that cannot be matched by any amount of cable news coverage."

— Brandon Stanton, *Humans of New York*

"In a few years, when people will look back at our current time of conflicts, dislocation, and

displacement, the story of Doaa al-Zamel—and of those she saw die, and of the new life she saved—will stand out as one of its defining narratives."

— Bruno Giussani, European director, TED

"Fleming's account is as gripping as it is moving; yet as Doaa herself points out in an afterword, 'it is only a small glimpse of the hardship and pain that refugees around the world endure.'"

— *Financial Times*

"While it is the story of so many Syrians, so many refugees, it is also the story of one woman, and as such it should enable us to see beyond the cold weight of the numbers, and into an individual's own warm and vivid story... *If A Hope More Powerful Than the Sea* does push more people into action and solidarity, then it will have done vital work; the most important work, perhaps, that a book can do right now."

— *The Guardian*

"This poignant tale of survival and loss gives immediacy to the plight of Syrian refugees. In a spare, unobtrusive style, Fleming profiles Doaa Al Zamel, who as a teenager fled her homeland of Syria. Fleming's skillful writing brings new vividness to Al Zamel's dramatic story... This book amply demonstrates why she has since become a symbol of hope for other refugees. Fleming should be congratulated for bringing Al Zamel's inspiring and illuminating story to the page."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"In the hands of the right readers, it will change the minds of some Westerners about the intent and character of the foreign people who are streaming their way... More than anything else, this is a testimonial to the very definition of heroism—when, that is, an ordinary person responds in extraordinary ways to extraordinary events."

— *Kirkus Reviews*