

Adjusting Priorities to the New Global Order

An Interview with Richard Attias, Executive Chairman, Richard Attias & Associates

EDITORS' NOTE Born in Morocco in 1959, Richard Attias completed his studies in civil engineering and earned a master's degree in mathematics and physics. He began his career at IBM, and his passion for innovation led him to establish several companies in the IT industry and Global Communications fields. Attias also spent over a decade at Publicis Group, where he served as Executive Chairman of Publicis Events Worldwide. From 1995 to 2008, he was the Executive



Richard Attias

Producer of all World Economic Forum's meetings including the Annual Meeting in Davos. He also co-founded the Nobel Laureates Conferences with the late Elie Wiesel and designed more than 1,000 high-level events for governments, institutions, and corporations. In 2008, he was appointed by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum to create a strong ecosystem to lead the nation branding strategy of the Emirate of Dubai. Also, in 2008 he founded Richard Attias & Associates (RA&A), a strategic communication and advisory firm specializing in nation branding with a focus on attracting FDI. In his capacity of Executive Chairman of RA&A, he was supporting Morocco to become the top African country for tourism, hosting the Global Entrepreneurship Summit and five U.N. conferences. In 2009, he co-founded the Clinton Global Initiative and, in 2010, founded The New York Forum, followed by The New York Forum AFRICA. In parallel he was entrusted by President Macky Sall to position Senegal as one of the leading countries in Sub-Saharan, designing the country's events strategy and expanding the international awareness of Dakar, which became in two years the top destination in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2010, Attias is the architect of memorable platforms including: APEC CEO Summit (2011, Hawaii), Egypt Economic Development Conference (2015, Sharm El-Sheikh), Argentina Business and Investment Forum (2016, Buenos Aires), African Union Summit (2016, Lomé | 2019, Niamey), Bloomberg US – Africa Business Forum (2016, New York), One Planet Summit (2017, Paris), Bloomberg New Economy Forum (2018, 2021, 2022 Singapore | 2019, Beijing), Peace to Prosperity Summit (2019, Manama), Hegra Conference of Nobel Laureates (2020,

2022, AIUla), and the Future Investment Initiative (2017-2022, Riyadh). In 2018, Attias entered into a financial partnership with the Saudi Public Investment Fund, and in 2019, became the CEO of the FII Institute, a not-for-profit foundation with a mission of Impact on Humanity. Over the past 30 years, Attias' talent for anticipating and addressing the most pressing issues of our time, activating powerful networks and inspiring innovation has made him a trusted advisor of many heads of state who

sought his support in achieving economic and social development. Attias is the father of a daughter working at RA&A's New York office and the husband of Cecilia Attias, former First Lady of France and Chairwoman of the Cecilia Attias Foundation for Women, a New York-based not-for-profit organization.

FIRM BRIEF As a leading strategic communications firm and platforms curator, Richard Attias & Associates (RA&A) provides and curates the ideas, connections, and events to build the influence of its clients – corporations, governments, NGOs, and nonprofits. Decades of experience have led RA&A to certain conclusions about how best to design physical and virtual platforms, ceremonies, forums, and summits that drive short- and long-term sustainable impact with tangible results. Through bold diplomacy strategies, RA&A helps its clients navigate the opportunities and challenges of the geopolitical landscape during this unprecedented global transformation. Richard Attias & Associates (richardattiasassociates.com) has grown to an international team of 100+ experts with offices on each continent. RA&A has Sanabil Equities (part of the Public Investment Fund – PIF) as a minority shareholder.



2019 African Games Opening Ceremony for which RA&A won the Heavent Awards Grand Prize



Richard Attias speaking at the Hegra Conference of Nobel Laureates & Friends in 2022

What was your vision for creating Richard Attias & Associates and how has the firm evolved?

I was trained as a civil engineer, but I realized early in my career that my passion was to build bridges between people – not structures. By creating impactful global platforms, I have connected people from different countries, different generations, different sectors, and – perhaps most importantly – different points of view. This is my vision and my passion. The success of Richard Attias & Associates is rooted in this vision and our development these past few years has been exponential. We have grown to an international team of more than 120 experts with offices on four continents. Last year, I appointed a new executive team in support of our growth. In 2022, we curated more than 50 platforms – practically one a week. We continue to expand globally post-COVID with an eye toward further development in the United States.

How do you define Richard Attias & Associates’ mission and purpose?

At Richard Attias & Associates, we are not producers; we are catalysts encouraging nations and CEOs to talk and to lead. Our mission might sound very simple: to create connections and to foster discussions. We have seen these past few years that it’s in fact far from easy. In a world that has experienced many lockdowns, as well as more and more divisions, we strive to create new opportunities to bring people together in new and exciting ways. The Hegra Conference of Nobel Laureates is a great example of our mindset. In 2020, we brought 100 Nobel Laureates, Pulitzer and Pritzker Prize Winners, and great thinkers to AlUla, the first UNESCO world heritage site in Saudi Arabia, to discuss the most pressing global issues.

Will you provide an overview of Richard Attias & Associates’ services and offerings?

Richard Attias & Associates is a global strategic communication firm and platforms curator. We structure our services around five sub-brands: RA&A Advisory & Diplomacy

helps our clients navigate the unforeseen opportunities and challenges of the changing geopolitical landscape. RA&A Lab analyzes trends, and generates original content and programming for our platforms. In parallel, RA&A Live Experiences develops turn-key solutions for our clients, enabling them to host top-tier international summits and forums. As a fourth area of activity, we bet on innovation with RA&A Metaverse, dealing with all digital aspects, including bespoke virtual platforms. Finally, we have the RA&A Sports & Entertainment branch. We were behind the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in China in 2008, and more recently received the Heavent Awards’ Grand Prize for the 2019 African Games Opening Ceremony.

What has led to Richard Attias & Associates’ growth and how do you define the RA&A difference?

One of our clients calls RA&A the “Centurion American Express” because our events are exclusive, powerful, and elegant in every detail. Years of experience has led us to certain conclusions about how best to design physical and virtual platforms (as we did for the G20 during the pandemic), ceremonies and festivals, forums and summits that drive short- and long-term impact. During COVID, we all saw what the world was like without face-to-face communication, and it made us hungry for the magic that can only occur at in-person events. This renewed excitement led to 2022 being a record year for the company.

What do you see as the major challenges and opportunities the world is facing today?

A New Global Order is emerging and with it comes enormous opportunity to invest in humanity to shape a brighter future for all. This was the theme of the 6th Edition of the Future Investment Initiative (FII), produced by RA&A and hosted by the FII Institute. There were over 7,000 participants from 90 countries, which speaks to the excitement of doing business globally. The power shift is only going to become more pronounced – drivers of changes are living in the East and in the South, not so much in the North anymore.

As for the challenges, we need to accept that we are living in an era of unpredictability, uncertainty, and recurrent crises. And yet, we need to stay optimistic. One promising outcome of the FII Institute’s Priority Report was that 77 percent of people globally believe that their lives are headed in the right direction – even if their countries and the



Richard Attias and Nelson Peltz at the 6th Edition of the Future Investment Initiative in 2022

world aren't. So perhaps the biggest challenge really is: how do we make things better for the world – and not just for ourselves? Many platforms that we've created – FII, Hagra Conference of Nobel Laureates, New York Forum, Sync Digital Well-being Summit, One Planet Summit – seek to answer this key question and drive impact.

What are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

As I always tell my staff, we play in the World Cup of Events, and our clients have high expectations from us, especially because we deal with many heads of state, CEOs, Nobel Laureates, and more. I know my team would describe me as a boss with very high expectations. I always challenge them to give their best and to think like adventurers. But I hope that they would also recognize that I lead by example. I stay connected, I'm always the first one up and the last one asleep. The key to effective leadership is carrying strong values: being audacious, being courageous, being passionate, and always playing as one team. Then we can achieve anything. My personal motto: Impossible is not in my vocabulary.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?

Absolutely. It's crucial for me and it defines my whole career. As an entrepreneur, you need to remain very aware that you can lose as much as you can win. You have to be driven by performance and demonstrate a high level of adaptability when you decide to build your own business as I did multiple



Richard Attias with Michael Bloomberg and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, at One Planet Summit 2018

times. I strongly believe that it's a vocation. Of course, it's also dedication, but it's first something that you feel, an emotion pushing you to dream bigger. The feeling never goes away, I still wake up thinking about new projects and I keep implementing changes and adjusting my priorities every day. Most of all, I am really lucky to have a supportive family in this adventure.

Richard Attias & Associates is celebrating its 15th year in 2023. Do you take time to enjoy the process and appreciate what you have accomplished?

Frankly, the process never stops, and the business never sleeps at RA&A as we are truly global. To celebrate our 15th year, we will gather for an all-staff retreat to highlight our successes and to talk about where we are headed. When I take my own time to reflect, I look back on some minor miracles that we have accomplished under challenging circumstances. We are one of the only event companies that hasn't stopped working or laid off employees during the pandemic. Why? Because we adapted. When the world couldn't meet physically, we used that crisis as an opportunity to create our own new innovative virtual platforms, ceremonies, and forums. And we managed to make the Saudi presidency of the G20 happen in 2020 by pioneering the first virtual meetings of the Leaders' Summit.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this unprecedented time?

We see a growing phenomenon of turnover, the Great Resignation, in the United States and in Europe. People are looking for real meaning in their jobs – along with a salary that will allow them to afford the rising cost of living. But I wouldn't be too pessimistic. I come across passionate young people every day – including the fantastic junior staff in my company – and their energy inspires me.

So, I would say to our youth: cultivate your entrepreneurial spirit, innovate. Stick to your core values, find your passion and your priorities while being pragmatic, and find a mentor. ●



H.E. Mubammadu Buhari (President of Nigeria), H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou (Former President of Niger), H.E. Uburu Kenyatta (Former President of Kenya) and Richard Attias at FII 3rd Edition in 2019