From ACAP to RightsML: the news industry and the future of ODRL

W3C Workshop on the Future of ODRL
London, 20-21 July 2026

Who is IPTC? Why are we here?

- IPTC — standards body for news media
- NewsML-G2 · ninjs · NewsCodes · Photo & Video Metadata · RightsML · Media Provenance (C2PA)
- We are implementers as well as standardisers
- This is a practitioner's view, not new formal semantics

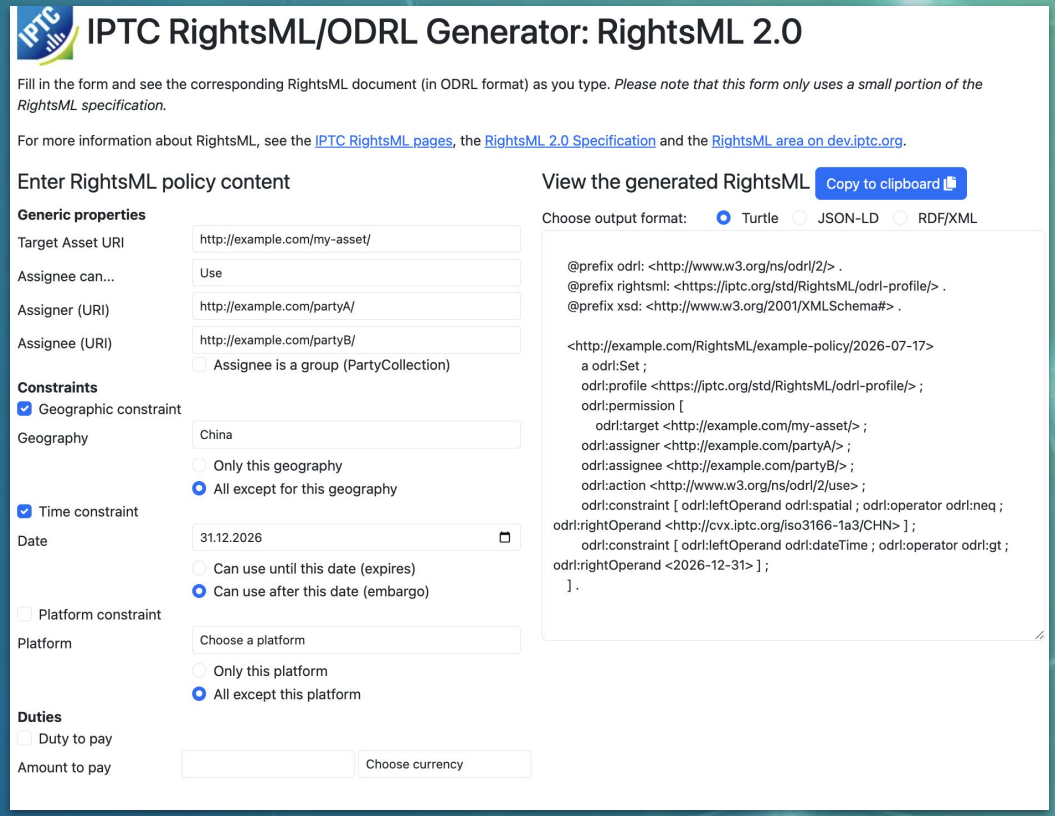
Some IPTC Voting Members

How we got here

- ACAP (2006, robots.txt) — failed: search engines wouldn't honour it
- ACAP pivoted to ODRL → handed to IPTC 2011 → re-branded as RightsML
- RightsML 2.0 (2018)
  - one of the first ODRL profiles
  - IPTC helped shape the profile mechanism and wrote two of the implementations
- Profile is now "thin" — nearly all terms come from ODRL: the profile system in action

Recent work: lowering the barrier

- Embed or link rights in NewsML-G2, ninjs, Photo Metadata, Video Metadata Hub (“Linked Encoded Rights Expression”)
- RightsML Generator
  - build policies without hand-writing JSON-LD or RDF/XML
- simplerights.iptc.org
  - restrictions as URIs that content-negotiate to ODRL
- Caveat: a standalone SimpleRights policy has no target — it's really a template



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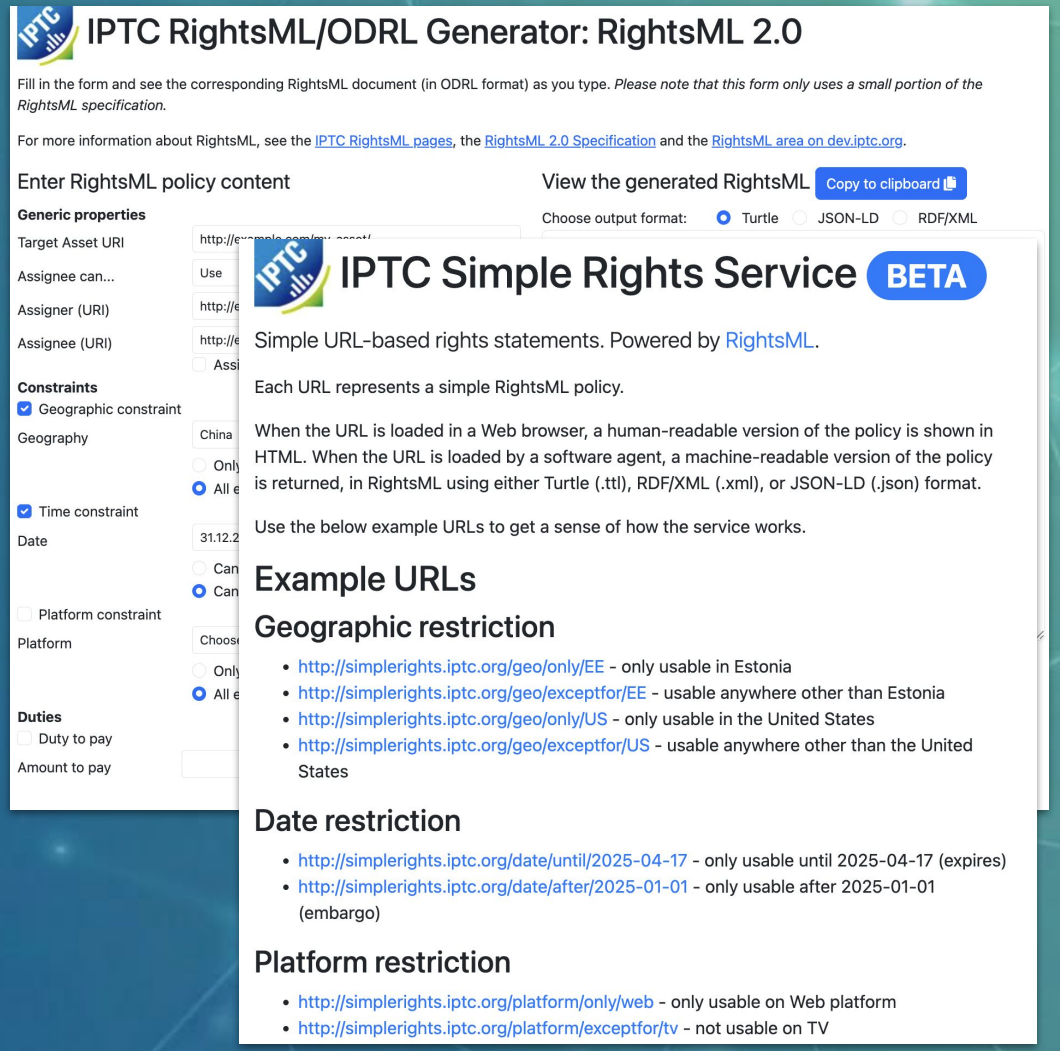


How do news agencies actually convey rights information?

- We asked our members how they signal rights
- Three agencies:

- None uses ODRL in production
- Each built its own answer to handle rights

*** Last-minute addition: PA Media / Alamy does actually use ODRL for syndicated news content! I will pass on details when I receive them.**

Reuters: compact codes, as free text

- "Out codes": Broadcast/Digital : restriction
- Documented in Reuters Restrictions Guide
- Small set:
  - No Use [Country]
  - No Use [Company]
  - No Archive, No Resales, No New Uses After…
- Carried as free text in usageTerms:

  “Broadcast: No Use Brazil. Digital: No Use Brazil.”
  - Clear to a human, opaque to a machine
  - English-only

<usageTerms xml:lang="en">Broadcast: None. Digital: None.</usageTerms>
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use Broadcast. Digital: None.</usageTerms>
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: None. Digital: No Use Digital.</usageTerms>
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use Brazil. Digital: No Use Brazil.</usageTerms>
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use CNN. Digital: No Use CNN.</usageTerms>

dpa:
"ODRL too complex, SimpleRights too simple"

- Needs per-photo territory rights for republished agency photos
- Real need: "only a few countries" or "the world except a few"
- Gaps found: SimpleRights can't do a set of countries; neither names "the world"
- Built their own code:
  - dnlrights:area-AT-CH-DE
  - dnlrights:area-world--GB--IR

AP: rights as free text, spread across fields

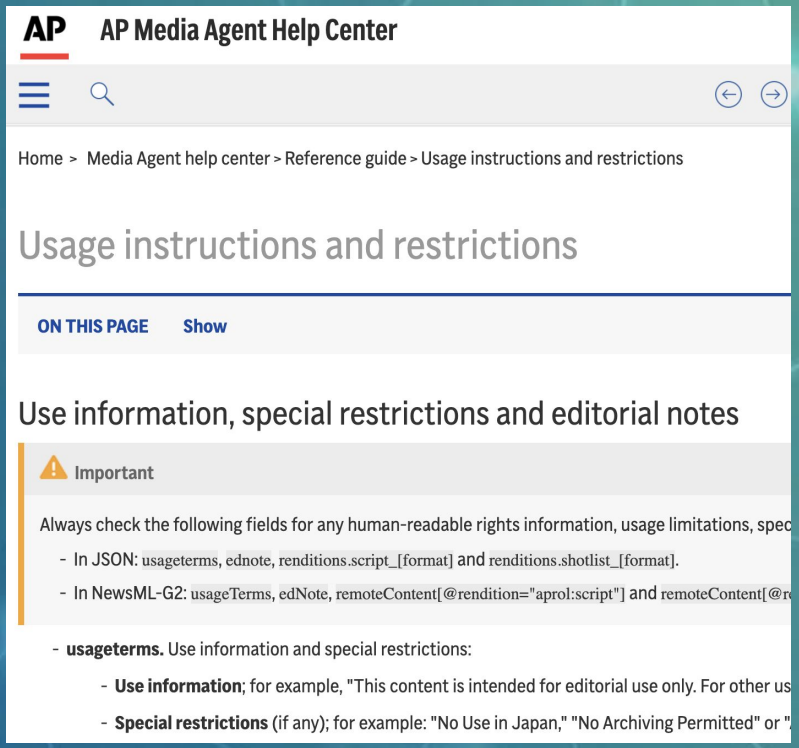
Restrictions as free text across NewsML-G2 fields:

- usageTerms (client)
- edNote (internal)
- video-script RESTRICTION SUMMARY

Phrasing echoes Reuters:

- "No Use in Japan", "No Archiving", "AP Clients Only"

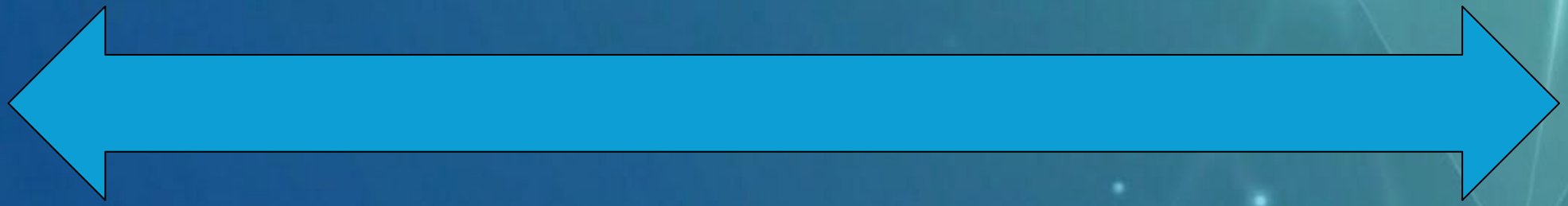
Only a few items (e.g. expires) are machine-actionable



Source: AP public API sdocs

The missing middle

- Everyone signals rights as human-readable text; two invented compact codes; none uses ODRL
- A de facto shared vocabulary exists, but isn't standardised
- The solution sits somewhere between the two



ODRL
fully expressive, too complex

SimpleRights
easy, not expressive enough

ODRL makes it computable

- “Not in China, not by CNN, not resold" → an ODRL policy:
  - prohibition:
    - `use` where `spatial = CHN`
    - `use` by party CNN
    - `sell`
- Each clause defined:
  - country = controlled-vocab URI
  - queryable
  - enforceable
  - language-independent

What we need from ODRL's future

1. A URI-shortcut / named-policy mechanism
2. Composability of simple expressions: country sets + party + action
3. Lightweight vocabularies for the common restrictions
4. An explicit notion of scope ("the world" / “all-except”)
5. Standard identifiers — countries, and orgs like "CNN" (cf. GMI, ISO IWA 44:2025)
6. Reusable, asset-independent policy templates

Issue: Signalling vs enforcement

- Publishers can express their rights. They can't compel anyone to honour them, least of all an AI crawler
  - The legal system is the ultimate arbiter, but that should be the last resort
- ACAP failed on this point 20 years ago
- For the TDM/AI era: make machine-readable rights simple to author, cheap to adopt, visible on the open web

Thank you!

Happy to discuss these issues and more

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simplerights.iptc.org

Appendix: RSL and TDMRep in the news industry

RSL (Really Simple Licensing) defines its own rights framework

- Used by Bild (DE), The Guardian (GB)
- (used by both in a very simplistic way: “prohibit all”)

TDMRep uses ODRL for expressing rich / complex rights

- Used by some news players (none of them IPTC members)
  - Ouest-France (ODRL TDM policy)
  - Le Parisien (ODRL TDM policy)