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Before joining CNA, Dr. Barrett was Canada's Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, where he chaired the IAEA's Board of Governors, and was Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization and to the United Nations in Vienna. He has served as Ambassador to Austria and to the Slovak Republic.

Dr. Barrett has a BA (Honours) and MA from the University of Toronto, and a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics.