



Photo courtesy of the CCPR Centre

## **Tribute to Professor Christof Heyns**

With profound sadness the Human Rights Committee pays tribute to Professor and friend Christof Heyns, who passed away unexpectedly on 28 March 2021.

Christof Heyns, an academic, an international law expert and lifelong advocate for the human rights of all, served as a member of the Human Rights Committee between 2017 and 2020. His expert knowledge, experience, creativity, work ethic, warmth, humility, kindness and collaborative spirit leave a deep and indelible mark on the Human Rights Committee's work to protect victims around the world.

Christof Heyns joined the Human Rights Committee in 2017, bringing with him a wealth of professional experience and expertise, including as Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and Professor of Human Rights Law and Co-director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa at the University of Pretoria.

During his time with the Human Rights Committee, Professor Heyns made an extraordinary contribution to its work. This was exemplified by his leadership as Rapporteur in the development of General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly. The General Comment, published in July 2020, which provides an authoritative guidance on the right of

assembly, was met with wide approval by stakeholders at a time of unique challenges to civil and political rights. Christof Heyns skillfully led the Committee in adopting this seminal text under highly challenging circumstances and showed an exemplary commitment to consultation with stakeholders across the world throughout its development.

Apart from this exceptional contribution, which will have a lasting impact on the promotion and protection of civil and political rights worldwide, Christof Heyns showed consistent and committed leadership during dialogues with State parties on the implementation of the Covenant, as well as during assessment of the individual cases brought by victims of human rights violations. Professor Heyns was committed to the continual improvement of the working methods of the Committee, leading efforts to standardize work on the assessment of state reporting and to maximize the overall impact of the Treaty Bodies.

Current and former members of the Committee, as well as UN secretariat staff were all personally touched by the work ethic and values of Christof Heyns. He was a longstanding friend to many and, along with his exceptional contribution to the work of the Committee, leaves a lasting legacy of kindness and collaborative working.

Christof Heyns was already very missed by all those involved in the work of the Human Rights Committee, following the end of his tenure in 2020. An online celebration of his and other members' time with the Committee was held in December 2020. Christof's musical talents took centre stage, when he led an international online chorus in a memorable rendition of *Wish You Were Here* by Pink Floyd. Those lyrics, as well as the references to the Human Rights Committee family in Christof's farewell speech, remain with us all.

All our thoughts and prayers are with his mother Renée, his wife, Fearika, his two daughters Willemien and Renée, his son Adam, his son-in-law Arné François and grandson Isak at this difficult time.

There is a [memorial page on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/107292334791893/posts/107356184785508/?d=n) in memory of Professor Christof Heyns created by the Centre of Human Rights at the University of Pretoria and the invitation to anyone and everyone to share how Christof has impacted their lives:

<https://www.facebook.com/107292334791893/posts/107356184785508/?d=n>.