



Professor  
Christof Heyns |



Candidate of the Republic of South Africa  
for election to the  
United Nations Human Rights Committee

2017



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## Introduction

It is with great pleasure that the Republic of South Africa presents the candidature of Christof Heyns for election to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee, the treaty monitoring body of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, starting in 2017.

Christof Heyns (born in 1959) is Professor of Human Rights Law and the Director of the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa at the University of Pretoria, where he has also served as the Director of the Centre for Human Rights and as Dean of the Faculty of Law.

During the last six years, Professor Heyns has served as the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. He is also one of the three experts appointed to conduct the UN Independent Investigation on Burundi and serves as its chair.

## Education and background in South Africa

Prof. Heyns started his career in Human Rights during the apartheid years, when as a young lecturer he was an active member of the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria. The centre and Prof. Heyns participated in cross-border meetings with members of the then outlawed African National Congress about a

future constitutional dispensation for South Africa. The centre also hosted what turned out to be a seminal conference on a Bill of Rights for South Africa at the University of Pretoria in 1986, during the height of the State of Emergency.

The centre played an active role in the writing of the final Constitution and Prof. Heyns was involved in the technical process to dismantle the Bantustans.

Prof. Heyns holds the following degrees:

- BLC and LLB as well as BA (Hons) and MA (Philosophy) cum laude from the University of Pretoria
- LLM from Yale Law School (where he was a Fulbright Scholar)
- PhD (on the history and legal aspects of the non-violent part of the struggle against racial domination in South Africa) from the University of the Witwatersrand.

At the Centre for Human Rights, he was a co-founding editor of the *African Human Rights Law Journal* and the *African Human Rights Law Reports*. He initiated the very successful African Human Rights Moot Court Competition as well as the Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa. He is now working to establish human rights moot courts as part of the curriculum in South Africa's schools.

## International academic exposure

Prof. Heyns has presented lectures and made presentations on human rights at leading universities in many parts of the world, and has participated in the training of military officers in Uganda, Tanzania and other countries.

He teaches regular human rights seminars at master's level at Oxford University and at the American University in Washington DC, where he is an Adjunct Professor.

He has held Humboldt Fellowships at the Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg, Germany, and a Fulbright Fellowship at the Human Rights Programme at Harvard Law School.

He serves or has served on the editorial boards of academic journals in South Africa, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Brazil, Uganda, Turkey and Costa Rica.

## Collaboration with regional human rights systems

A significant part of Prof. Heyns' career has been devoted to working with regional human rights mechanisms, based on his belief that they play a crucial role in ensuring that the international human rights system becomes less top-down and more strongly reflects local values and interests. After serving short stints at both the Inter-American and European systems at the beginning of his career, he retained life-long contacts with these systems. He was a UN adviser during the process of setting up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights in Bangkok, Thailand.

As a South African, his strongest engagement has been with the African regional system. He has served on several occasions as technical adviser on human rights to the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In particular, Prof. Heyns served as adviser to the African Commission in developing its influential General Comment on the Right to Life, adopted by the commission in 2015.

## Experience within the UN system

Prof. Heyns was one of the leaders of a study on the impact of the UN human rights treaty system for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2000/01). This study traced the impact of the system in 20 states. It was subsequently published as an academic book: *The Impact of the United Nations Human Rights Treaties on the Domestic Level* (2002).

As UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2010 – 2016), Prof. Heyns presented technical reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly on cutting-edge issues such as: the protection of the right to life of journalists; the use of force by law-enforcement officials; the death penalty; armed drones; autonomous weapons; and private security providers. He was requested by the Human Rights Council to develop guidelines on the practical management of demonstrations. He conducted country visits to eight countries to undertake in-depth analyses of the situation on the ground. In 2014, Prof. Heyns initiated the process of revising the *UN Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions*.

As chair of the UN Independent Investigation on Burundi (2015/16), he has visited Burundi and reported on the findings of the investigation to the Human Rights Council.

## Conclusion

To retain its relevance and impact, the international human rights system needs constant innovation and a readiness to take on new challenges. We are confident that Professor Christof Heyns will make a sterling contribution to the work of the committee.

## Some publications:

- 'The International Law framework regulating the use of armed drones' (with Dapo Akande) *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 2016
- 'Human rights and the use of increasingly autonomous weapons systems during domestic law enforcement' *Human Rights Quarterly* 2016
- 'The right to life and the progressive abolition of the death penalty' in *Moving Away from the Death Penalty* 2015
- *Compendium of key human rights documents of the African Union* 2013 (also available in French, Arabic and Portuguese)
- 'Universality and the growth of regional human rights systems' in *The Oxford Handbook of International Human Rights Law* 2013
- 'The long-term human rights implications of targeted killings' *Harvard International Law Journal* 2013
- 'Protecting the right to life of journalists: the need for a higher level of engagement' *Human Rights Quarterly* 2013
- 'South West Africa/Namibia (Advisory Opinions and Judgments)' *Max Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law* 2008
- 'Constitutional human rights law in Africa' (with Waruguru Kagungo) *South African Journal on Human Rights* 2006
- *Human rights law in Africa*, vols. 1 and 2, 2004 (also in French).