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Dr Johan Heyns: An Exorcist of Apartheid – in Memory of his Son Christof Heyns



On Sunday, 28 March, Christof Heyns suddenly and unexpectedly passed away during a hike in his native country South Africa. As founder of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Pretoria and the

African Master in Human Rights and Democratisation, he was one of the pioneers and architects of the Global Campus of Human Rights. As UN Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions and member of the UN Human Rights Committee, he was one of the most well-known and influential human rights experts of our time. Most importantly, he was a wonderful human being and a great friend to many of us.

Chris' father, Johan Heyns, was a leading Calvinist theologian and moderator of the general synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, the main Afrikaans church in South Africa. In 1982, he publicly rejected the notion that apartheid was the will of God, and caused a furore at that year's synod by openly supporting multiracial marriages. Under his leadership at the 1986 synod, tens of thousands of church members and many congregations broke away to form the [Afrikaans Protestant Church](#). In 1990, he finally declared apartheid a sin, which had a large impact on the white minority government and helped opening doors towards dismantling the apartheid regime. On 5 November 1994, just half a year after Nelson Mandela had been inaugurated as South Africa's first black President, Johan Heyns was assassinated by a white extremist at his home when playing cards with three of his grandchildren, aged 2, 8 and 11.

Another grandchild and son of Christof, Adam, was 5 years old when his grandfather was assassinated. Together with Christof, he directed and produced the video "Dr. Johan Heyns – Exorcist of Apartheid", which was winning the award of best short documentary at the Jozi Film Festival in South Africa. It is a moving document about the brutality of the apartheid system and the difficulties to change it from within. The story of Johan Heyns also makes us understand why Christof became such a dedicated human rights champion. We miss you and will never forget you!

Photo credits [Behance/Exorcist of Apartheid](#).

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