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The Dutch Christian Confronting the International Left



Henk Jan van Schothorst and Päivi Räsänen

"The UN is teeming with leftist organizations. I thought: Someone has to do something. Why shouldn't I try it?"

- [Jonathon Van Maren](#)
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After a half-hour audience with Henk Jan van Schothorst, President Chan Santokhi of Surinam was vexed. Abortion is illegal and opposition to the LGBT movement is strong in the small South American country. But the Surinamese ambassador to Brussels had recently signed a binding trade agreement with the European Union that included mandatory provisions on sexuality and “reproductive rights.”—without any public debate. Quietly inserting a radical social agenda into ostensibly economic negotiations is a key neo-colonial strategy of Western powers, and it is very effective.

Van Schothorst advised the president to withdraw the signature and send the treaty text to the Surinam parliamentary assembly, giving them six months to compare it with the country's laws, and return the Surinam position to the EU. If the EU rejected it, Surinam could simply find other trade partners. "I thanked the president for his time and his attention," he recounted. "'No,' he and his spiritual advisor said, 'We must thank you. God has sent you. Would you please pray for us?'" The Dutch activist and the South American president bowed their heads together in prayer.

Surinam was the last stop on Van Schothorst's whirlwind December tour of four South Caribbean countries. Henk Jan van Schothorst is the founder and executive director of [Christian Council International](#) (CCI), and his mission is to create "a transatlantic and international network of Christians and conservatives involved in public policy and influence policy from a Christian perspective," working at the UN, EU, AU, and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) "to stand up for a Christian voice worldwide with a focus on life, family, and freedom of religion and education."

On this trip, Van Schothorst briefed Christian parliamentarians, pastors, professionals, and high-ranking politicians on the details of the 20-year ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific)-European Union Partnership Agreement. "It intrudes into almost every area of the public and private life in signatory countries," Van Schothorst noted. "From dictating abortion, to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), to parental discipline, and social, sexual, gender, and cultural norms and more, the treaty goes far beyond the 2000 Cotonou Agreement it is intended to replace, violating national sovereignty in many ways." That, of course, is deliberate.

Earlier in 2023, Van Schothorst had been invited to the Caribbean after a series of meetings at the semi-annual EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assemblies, where he and his CCI colleagues met and spoke with parliamentarians from Caribbean and Pacific countries; out of 16 Carib countries, 10 had not yet signed the treaty. Van Schothorst detailed the ways that the treaty obligations conflicted with the conservative laws of these countries—and how the inclusion of these provisions was intended to change laws on the issues of abortion and sexuality. In Surinam, after "appearances on radio, TV, and meetings with Christian professionals, spiritual leaders, parliamentarians, and the president, the Surinamese people became aware of the EU's ideological power grab and a lively public debate erupted."

In Grenada—where 96.6% of the population identifies as Christian—he met parliamentarians and pastors; the country later signed the treaty "at the insistence of

the EU and with the promise that nothing substantive would change compared to the previous treaty (although that commitment was not included in writing).” MPs and ministers made time to meet in Trinidad (63% Christian) and Tobago (90% Christian); and the government there declined to sign. “On my transit to touristic Barbados, a liberal influx greeted me at the airport,” Van Schothorst told me. “The number of Christians has fallen to just under half of the population. I was not surprised that this country signed on.”

At the signing ceremony in Samoa on 15 November 2023, it turned out that 35 of the 79 countries had not yet signed the treaty. Why? Van Schothorst believes that CCI had something to do with it. “That was partially a result of our raising awareness,” he told me. “Dozens of times over the past three years, in Africa but also in Europe, we have gone to countries to point out the dangers in the treaty.” His Caribbean tour is one example of CCI’s work and real-world impact.

Henk Jan is the third of ten children from a conservative Christian family in the Netherlands, and his interest in politics was first piqued when he heard his father’s denunciations of socialist prime minister Joop Den Uyl. After military service and a six-month mission in Guinea, West Africa, he became a teacher, studying history in the evenings. At Leiden University, he specialized in European Union studies and did an internship with a newly elected Christian Member of European Parliament. After a week and a half, Van Schothorst recalled, the MEP asked him to stay on.

Van Schothorst spent seven years in Brussels and Strasbourg in the European Parliament, mostly in the Committee on Foreign Affairs. “There, I saw the great power of the European Commission as the institution that initiates legislation,” he told me. “Often out of sight of both the population and its representatives, all kinds of regulations, laws, and treaty negotiations are made and had. The standards by which these invisible, unelected, and mostly permanent bureaucratic elites are increasingly developing in a leftist direction—especially when it comes to sensitive ethical issues. More and more power is being drawn to Brussels.”

Who was watching the proceedings and holding the leftist activists accountable from a Christian perspective? Van Schothorst saw almost no one. (Later he found some likeminded organizations such as C-Fam and Family Watch at the UN-level, as well as Alliance Defending Freedom.) Conversely, the ideological enemies of Christianity were everywhere, constantly pushing their views and their policy agendas, working with generously subsidized NGOs, and shaping policy at every level. When his young family began to suffer from his frequent absences, he quit Brussels and got a job at

the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy in The Hague on behalf of the SGP (Reformed Party), where he worked for four years. In his new role, he once again witnessed the power of progressive forces.

“I was responsible for the technical support of political parties in the process from one-party government to multiparty democracy in Kenya and Tanzania,” he told me. At the United Nations, he saw an all-out push by Western countries to smuggle abortion and the LGBT agenda into every law, policy, and treaty under the guise of “reproductive rights,” “non-discrimination,” and “sexual orientation and gender identity.” The same trends he had witnessed at the European Union were also underway at the UN.

“At the UN, there is no direct parliamentary control; and without sufficient watch and democratic control, international standards are set there. In negotiations, developing countries are often overrun by rich Western countries with their sexuality and gender ideologies.” Van Schothorst noted. “The various UN agencies are executive bodies of these philosophies rather than impartially serving the member states. It is teeming with leftist organizations. I thought: Someone has to do something. Why shouldn’t I try it?”

To combat the influence of the progressive “deep state” blob of NGOs, activists, and progressive delegates and politicians who dominate international institutions, Van Schothorst founded the Transatlantic Christian Council in 2013, which would later become Christian Council International. Fundraising proved difficult at first—Van Schothorst applied for charitable status from the Dutch government and was promptly refused. He fought the decision up the chain of command, and then in the courts. After two and a half years, three judges ruled unanimously in his favor with retroactive effect, and the Supreme Court rejected a government appeal in 2015.

Despite his victory, the legal battles cost tens of thousands of euros with little money coming in. Van Schothorst ended up working five years pro bono while his wife supported the family. The connections he made during his time at the EU’s Foreign Affairs Committee served him well, and he was able to begin meeting with politicians very quickly—even those with whom he disagreed. “I see my opponents as human beings created in the image of God, and some of them are my friends,” he said. “After a long discussion we can put it aside and have a friendly drink and talk about other things.”

Since the launch of CCI, raising awareness has been Van Schothorst’s primary goal. He is a go-between, informing Christians about the profoundly consequential goings-

on within international institutions, and lobbying and educating policymakers about the implications of various agreements. CCI has consultative status at the UN in New York, the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and the EU in Brussels, working hard to bring the Christian worldview to bear on the proceedings and to impact the final text of resolutions and policies (so that they at the least respect national sovereignty and democratically enacted laws of member states).

CCI has also joined with many other Christian organizations to speak out on the political persecution of Christians within Europe, such as Finland's Päivi Räsänen and the targeting of countries such as Hungary for its opposition to the LGBT agenda. Most tangibly, as previously mentioned, van Schothorst believes that CCI's efforts have contributed to the delayed signing of the EU-ACP treaty.

After a decade of hard work building the organization, Henk Jan van Schothorst hopes to take CCI to the next level. "We have an ambitious three-year program aiming to return Christian perspectives to the very center of public debate and policy in North America, Europe, and worldwide," he told me. "The Program for Life, Family, and Freedom at the UN, EU, AU, US, and its Member States protects Christian values and fundamental freedoms at a time when the Christian basis for these achievements is crumbling."

To accomplish this, Van Schothorst hopes to utilize CCI's consultative powers to mobilize "an international network of politicians, NGOs, legal specialists, educators, and journalists to defend family and freedom to policymakers." In the long-term, this would include offices and employees in multiple locations worldwide. It's an incredibly ambitious plan, and the forces he and his allies are up against are well-funded and culturally powerful. What Henk Jan van Schothorst is suggesting is a Christian version of the Left's long march through the institutions—a generational fight against long odds. But it must be done, nonetheless, and Van Schothorst's mindset echoes that of countless successful activists over the decades: "Why shouldn't I try it?"

Jonathon Van Maren is a contributing editor to *The European Conservative*. He has written for *First Things*, *National Review*, *The American Conservative*, and his latest book is *Prairie Lion: The Life & Times of Ted Byfield*.

- Tags: [European Parliament](#), [ideological colonialism](#), [Jonathon Van Maren](#), [United Nations](#)