



**GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR**

# **Anti-Rights Groups Take Aim at Transnational Trade Agreement**

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## Summary

Three anti-rights groups based in the global north are leading an attack on the [ACP-EU Partnership Agreement](#) (hereafter, the Agreement)—the governing system of development cooperation for aid and trade between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group of states. As the ACP-EU countries prepare to finalize the renewal of the economic agreement, Christian Council International (CCI), Family Watch International (FWI), and Political Network for Values (PNfV) are taking issue with EU efforts to include protective language on human rights, and specifically sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). They are also connecting at the national level, particularly on the African continent, with local anti-rights groups to undermine the Agreement by targeting regional bodies like the African Union and the East African Legislative Assembly, as well as relevant line ministries in their countries.

Anti-rights organizations have consistently attacked human rights policies and resolutions based on objections to language protecting SRHR. However, their expansion into transnational *economic* agreements is a new and concerning focus. It signals their ambitions to eviscerate rights and protections in areas where they do not historically work. The mission creep of anti-rights actors falls squarely among the broad, rising tensions in multilateral negotiations, particularly around issues such as gender, SRHR, and LGBTI rights at the United Nations. They are not only attacking progressive language to expand protections for marginalized populations, but, as evinced with this Agreement, are actively working to undermine agreed-upon SRHR language.

With this initiative, the three groups, in alliance with other U.S. and European anti-rights organizations, are calling on civil society and like-minded ACP and EU members of parliament to pressure their governments to amend the Agreement or altogether prevent its renewal. The emerging alliance between PNfV (which works with leaders and parliamentarians), FWI (which operates at the United Nations and country level), and CCI (self-described as “[the only public policy organization that is both explicitly Christian, transatlantic and international](#)”), highlights how ultra-right groups are maximizing their networks to connect the global to the national to impose regressive, fundamentalist Christian views on human rights, family, gender, and sexuality.

While it is unlikely that they will succeed in altogether derailing the Agreement renewal process, the investment of attention, time, and money warrants closer inspection by human rights activists and the media, as well as EU and ACP negotiators, parliamentarians, and other stakeholders. Anti-rights groups see the upcoming 42nd ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Plenary Meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, October 29 to November 2, 2022, as an opportunity to mobilize civil society to lobby African Union representatives against the Agreement.

## ACP-EU explainer

*The ACP-EU cooperation dates to the Lomé Convention of 1975, which provided a new framework on trade and aid. It is the most comprehensive economic agreement ever signed between the EU and partner countries from the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States. Successive agreements have been signed since and currently the version known as the 2000 Cotonou Agreement unites over 100 partner countries representing some 1.5 billion people.*

*Each agreement renewal negotiation process generally attends to emerging issues. The 2005 and 2010 agreement revisions addressed issues including security and political stability; climate change; sustainability; and aid effectiveness. The latest 2021 Agreement focuses on aid and trade, but also “Human Rights, Democracy, and Governance in People-Centered and Rights-based Societies,” and “Human and Social Development,” with agreed-upon SRHR language from “the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and commit to sexual and reproductive health and rights, in this context.”*

*The process for approving the new negotiated text has been stalled since April 2021—to date the Agreement has been negotiated, but it has not been signed nor ratified—largely due to the situation in Europe, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As a result, the Cotonou Agreement has been extended to June 2023, unless a new agreement enters into force.*

## Transnational mobilization

Christian Council International is [devoting significant resources to disrupting the Agreement](#).<sup>1</sup> Their work started in early 2021, when they hired an Ethiopia-based consultant to map all aspects of the African Union’s governmental structures and influences, as well as identify future stakeholders and partners for CCI. At the same time, CCI applied for NGO observer status at the [African Commission on Human and People’s Rights](#)<sup>2</sup> to monitor whether the “AU adopts policies and strategies that underline the Christian perspective on the right to life, family and freedom.” CCI also began building [a network of Christian conservative African Union members and NGOs](#) to “halt the ratification process of the ACP-EU Agreement.” This included working with Family

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<sup>1</sup> CCI anticipates spending \$2,085,000 over a three-year period (2022-2024). Their 2017 financial reporting, under their original name, Transatlantic Christian Council, show just 110,191 Euros from fundraising.

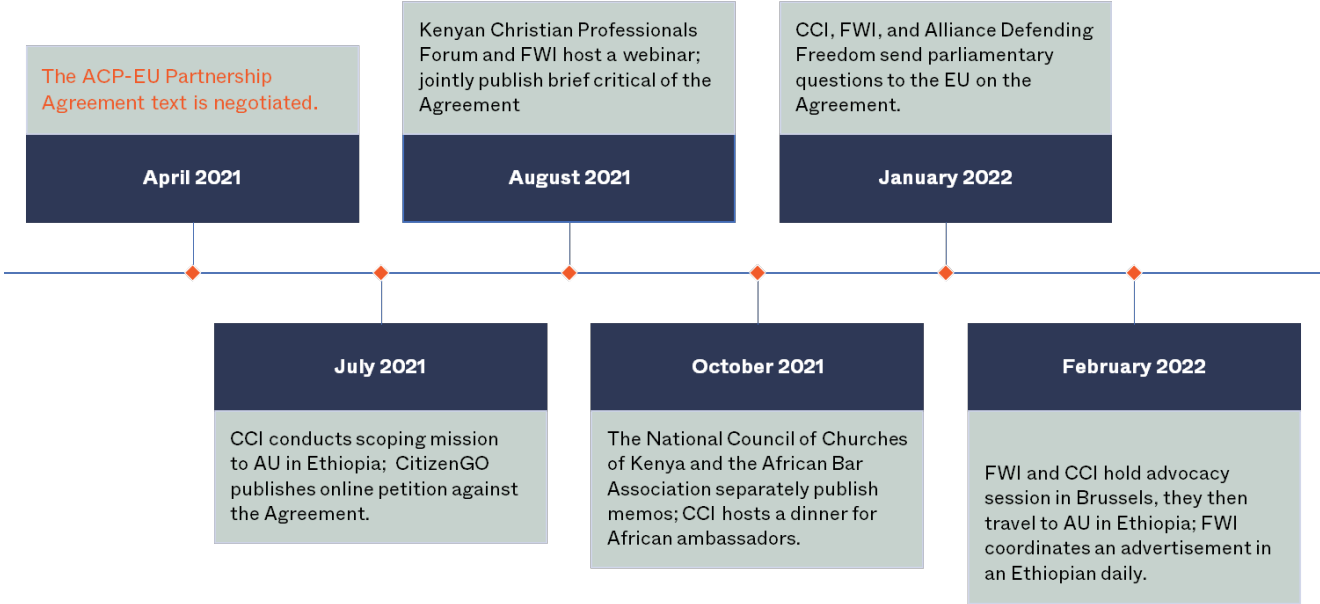
<sup>2</sup> The Commission was established by the African Charter and inaugurated on November 2, 1987. It is a quasi-judicial body tasked with promoting and protecting human rights and collective (peoples’) rights throughout the African continent, including considering and investigating individual complaints of violations of the Charter.

Watch International to create an “Africa Regional Working Group (under the Global ACP-EU Agreement Working Group).”

By mid-2021, other organizations had picked up the drumbeat against the Agreement. The Spain-based anti-rights organization CitizenGO [circulated a petition](#) to African presidents and the AU, calling on them to reject the Agreement.

Kenyan anti-rights organizations were also especially vocal against the Agreement. The Kenyan Christian Professionals Forum [circulated a policy brief](#) and [hosted a webinar with FWI](#) and parliamentarians on “Why Christians Should be Concerned” about the Agreement. On October 18, 2021, the National Council of Churches of Kenya issued a memo highlighting concerns about the treaty, while at the same time domesticating the threat by raising concerns about its effects on Kenyan families.

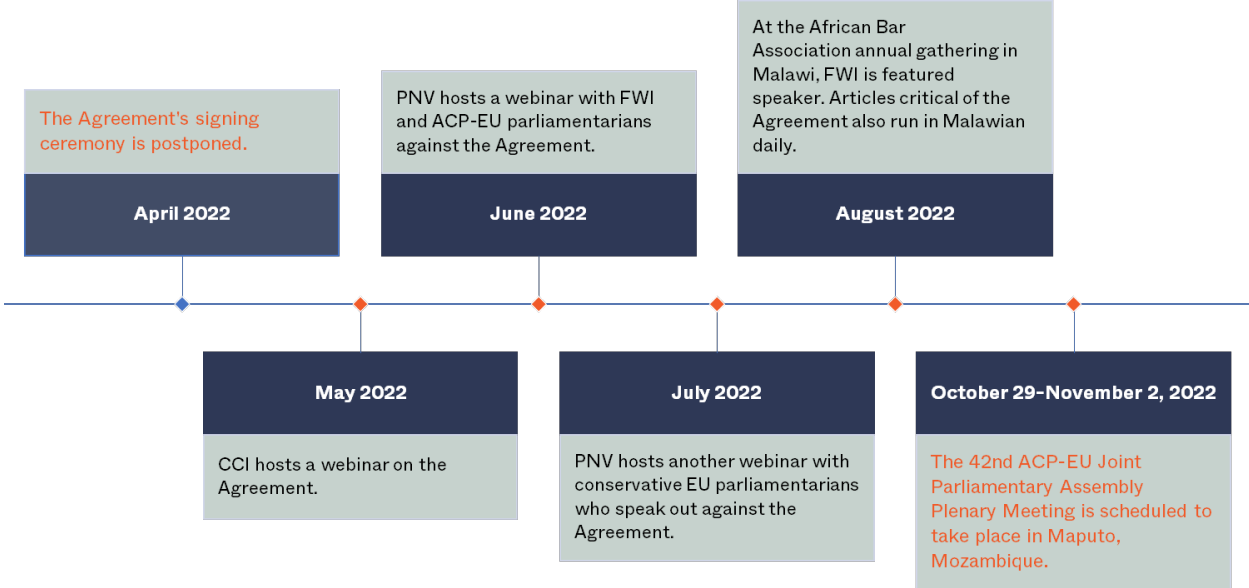
There was another significant uptick in activity in October 2021. CCI staff flew to Kigali, Rwanda, and hosted a high-level dinner for African ambassadors and lobbied directly with ministers who were attending an [AU-EU foreign affairs ministerial](#). According to CCI, [the investment paid off](#). Following the CCI dinner, “where the dangers of the ACP-EU agreement had been explained, the African Ambassadors came together internally to discuss the need to take out any notions of SRHR from the agreement that violates their national laws. This was then presented by their Foreign Ministers during the AU–EU Meeting.”



That same month, the [African Bar Association issued a communique](#) calling on African member states to “reconsider the Agreement with a view to aligning it with the African Charter on Human and Peoples [sic] Rights or place reservations on the clauses that offend sound African values on sexual and reproductive health.” The African Bar Association is increasingly a space where anti-rights groups see advocacy opportunities and are increasing their profile and advocacy in this space. This includes FWI, which is neither African nor a legal organization staffed by lawyers. Yet inexplicably, they held prominent speaking spots at the Association’s annual conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi in August 2022.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of 2021, CCI was looking beyond the ACP-EU Agreement and adding the Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Agreement to their scope of work, [advocating against both policies](#) with diplomats and ambassadors, and AU country delegates.

Having established an effective outreach in the Africa region, in January 2022, the groups shifted their attention to Europe. FWI and CCI partnered with Alliance Defending Freedom, to develop parliamentary questions for the European Commission on the Agreement. In February, [FWI and CCI held a joint advocacy session in Brussels, then immediately traveled to AU headquarters in Addis Ababa](#), Ethiopia to advocate against the provisions with African decision-makers.



<sup>3</sup> Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera opened the five-day event and was joined by FWI’s Sharon Slater. For a small organization (FWI’s 2018 990 tax returns show total revenue of \$727,049), FWI had very high-level representation at the conference. In addition to Slater, Richard Kakeeto, FWI Africa policy advisor and board member of the Life and Family Foundation of Uganda, and Seyoum Antonios, FWI Africa Director based in Addis Ababa, presented on two different panels. Program on file with Ipas.

In April, [CCI claimed victory](#); the signing ceremony had been postponed due to Russian aggression in Ukraine, giving CCI “more time to ensure that Life, Family, and Freedom are protected in the soon-to-be signed EU-ACP 20 years binding agreement.”

## Effectively undermining the Agreement

The blueprint for understanding the opposition to the Agreement, and the planned steps for disrupting this multilateral space, can be found in several Christian Council International and Family Watch International documents.<sup>4</sup> FWI launched one of its standard tactics: an unbranded website, menacingly titled “[Devious EU Treaty](#),” that misrepresents the Agreement and includes an hour-long video detailing the “hidden threats to the African family.” Additionally, [FWI and CCI jointly published a 2021 policy brief](#) detailing actions already taken to derail the Agreement.

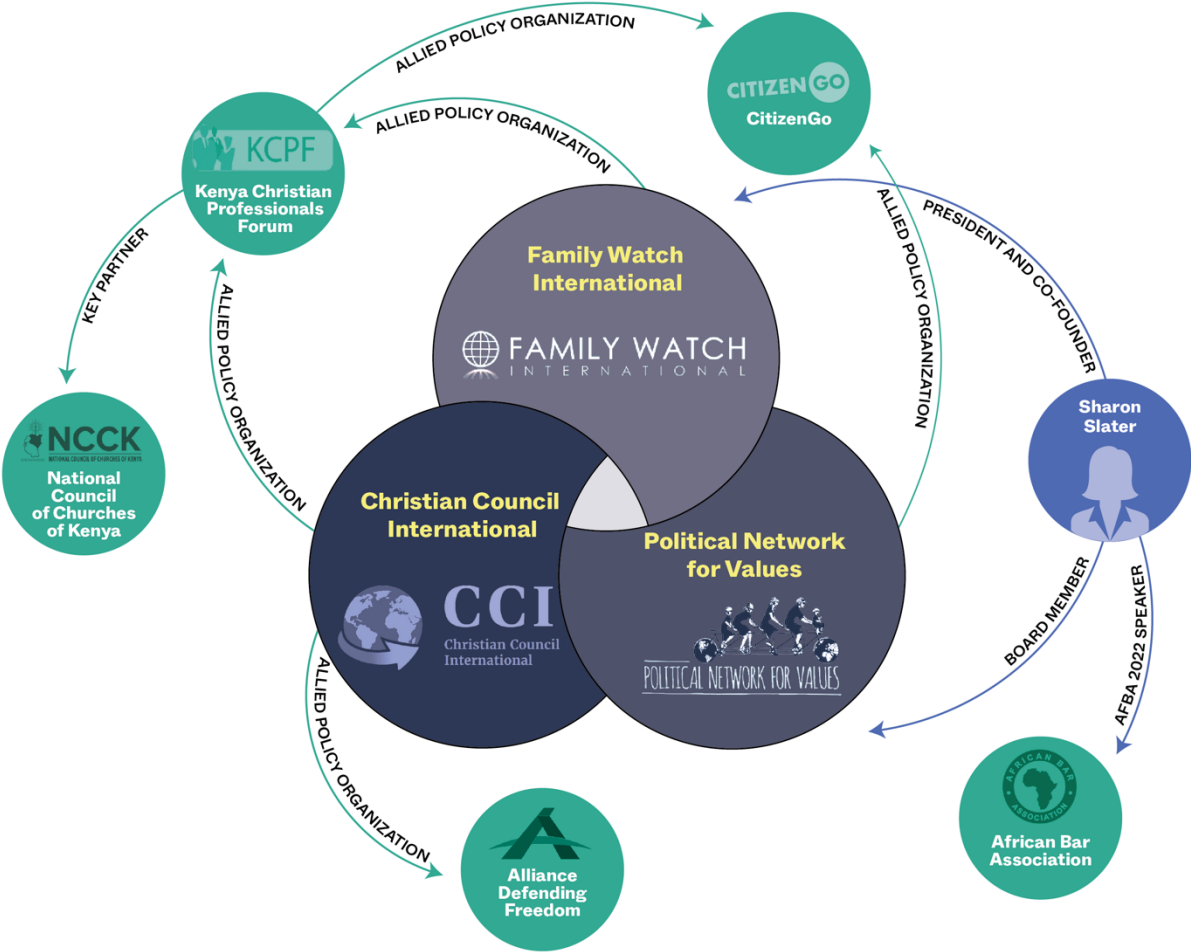


By the middle of 2022, the Political Network for Values had joined the anti-Agreement effort, lending its weight and connections, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. With this came heightened public engagement of parliamentarians of both ACP and EU countries affiliated with PNfV. On June 29, 2022, PNfV hosted a [high-level webinar](#) that included government representatives, PNfV staff, and Sharon Slater of FWI.<sup>5</sup> Parliamentarians [Ashems Songwe from Malawi](#) and Lucy Akello of Uganda presented. Akello coordinates the Uganda Pro-life Parliamentary Caucus and is currently advocating against a regional East Africa reproductive health bill. Songwe is an influential member of the ruling Malawi Congress Party and heads the ACP-EU joint parliamentary assembly delegation. Like others on the webinar, Songwe called on civil society to use the upcoming October 2022, [plenary meeting in Maputo, Mozambique](#), to voice opposition to the Agreement and lobby their members of parliament.

4 These include including its three-year sponsor proposal, 2021 Annual Report, and May 2022 webinar with PowerPoint presentation.

5 During the June 2022 PNfV webinar, Slater set out arguments with the Agreement’s sections on “Human Rights, Democracy, and Governance in People-Centered and Rights-based Societies,” and “Human and Social Development.”

EU members of parliament have also spoken out against the Agreement, including members of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. [Bert-Jan Ruissen](#), a Dutch national MEP, insisted during the PNFV webinar that the left “is against a Christian worldview” at the European Parliament and that the scope of the Agreement exceeded the EU’s competency.<sup>6</sup> [CCI hosted a podcast with Ruissen](#) on the Agreement in September 2021.



<sup>6</sup> In a subsequent [July 2022 PNFV webinar](#) on the global implications of the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión—member of the EP representing Spain, also of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group—picked up the language used by Ruissen. She called the Agreement a violation of sovereignty that forces countries to accept SRHR against their culture.



## Fundamentalist groups driving the movement

Family Watch International is an [ultra-right organization](#) that both lobbies at the United Nations and with countries around the world. Founded in 1999, FWI, almost single-handedly led by Slater, promotes anti-LGBT and anti-SRHR narratives in multilateral negotiation spaces, with a particular focus against comprehensive sexuality education and other SRHR-related initiatives they believe are threats to the “natural family.” FWI’s playbook pulls from well-used anti-rights advocacy strategies that include the development of websites and petitions that target United Nations and other SRHR initiatives. While Slater attacks the Agreement as colonialist in nature and ambition, she did not reflect on her own colonialist complicity, which includes her U.S. organization interfering in EU and ACP affairs and lobbying directly with APC countries.

A more recent addition to the anti-rights ecosystem, the Political Network for Values was created in 2014 to [host a global network](#) of parliamentarians, politicians, and anti-rights activists who share strategies and model legislation to pass regressive national laws and public policies on SRH and LGBTI issues. What makes PNfV of concern is the network’s ambition to disrupt international cooperation mechanisms. PNfV takes a holistic approach to its work—tackling regional bodies by first harnessing the national work of key parliamentarians and creating transversal relationships and communications between them and their NGO partners. In its early stages, PNfV focused largely on Latin America and the Caribbean and making links to anti-rights actors in Spain, but they have since expanded their global focus.

Finally, CCI is concerning given its link [to both Dutch and U.S. conservatives](#) and their work to mobilize decision-makers, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, and the media to “strengthen the work and boldness of Christians and conservatives in the public square on both sides of the Atlantic and worldwide.” CCI (formerly known as The Christian Council, or TCC) is embedded within anti-gender networks in Europe as well as the Dutch far-right. The organization is now registered in both the Netherlands and the United States. It was founded in 2013 by a former Dutch political adviser, Henk Jan van Schothorst, and a former U.S. diplomat, Todd Huizinga. Well before the ACP-EU renewal process, CCI had held strategic discussions with [like-minded Christian fundamentalist groups](#), including FWI and the Alliance Defending Freedom.

The attack against the ACP-EU agreement was originally identifiable as an FWI and CCI initiative. Now, with PNfV’s involvement, it can harness more political capital through PNfV’s global roster of parliamentarians.<sup>7</sup> Given the collective power of the three organizations, with support from CitizenGO and Alliance Defending Freedom, it is of note that they are aligning their objectives and networks to impact the global to local continuum of influence.

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<sup>7</sup> FWI has not traditionally partnered with PNfV. It was not until PNfV’s 2017 Transatlantic Summit in Brussels that the organization was identified as a sponsor of the event.

## Anti-rights organizing

*Working at different levels, linking multilateral and regional efforts to country-level mobilizing, key actions against the Agreement include:*

- *Calling for ACP parliamentarians to advocate at the country-level to either amend the human rights language or derail the Agreement altogether.*
- *Mobilizing civil society organizations to work with religious groups to lobby their representatives against the Agreement at the upcoming meeting in Maputo.*
- *Framing any references to human rights in international agreements as a violation of national sovereignty.*
- *Pushing narratives that any attempt to include human rights language in partnership agreements is colonialist and an insidious attempt to negate the will of partner countries and their cultures.*
- *At the European level, promoting the narrative that efforts to include human rights language in development cooperation agreements exceeds the scope of the EU.*
- *Encouraging the Pan-African Parliament to be more aware of and involved in the Agreement.*
- *Seeking to use case law at the European Court to challenge the Agreement.*
- *Calling on ACP countries to include reservations when signing future treaties.*

## What's next

Well over a year has lapsed since April 2021 when the chief EU and Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States negotiators concluded their deliberations and initialed an agreed text. Despite CCI's claims of influence in the process, the delay is largely due to the current economic situation in Europe, and more recently, Russian aggression in Ukraine. This pause in negotiations has given anti-rights actors more time to gather forces against the agreement. They are now mobilizing for the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Plenary Meeting, scheduled for late October 2022 in Maputo, Mozambique. The EU Parliament has consistently placed great importance on the assembly, which, given the regional gathering of parliamentarians and other representatives, including the private sector, is a valuable and important mechanism in the renewal process.

While it is unlikely they will succeed in altogether derailing the ACP-EU partnership renewal agreement, it is possible the collective work of CCI-PNfV-FWI to rally ACP parliamentarians and their far-right European conservative allies will result in a large mobilization at and around the event. It will be critical to monitor the activities of anti-rights civil society and like-minded politicians taking aim at the treaty, both at the national level and within the European Parliament. This includes watching for statements from the above-mentioned parliamentarians, their parties, and sharing information with EU and ACP representatives negotiating on the treaty. This is particularly the case if some African members states bring their objections to the ACP-EU agreement to the Pan-African Parliament, as encouraged by CCI. And lastly, it is important to monitor the recruitment of English-speaking Caribbean states by PNfV.

If PNfV, FWI, CCI and their allies succeed in deleting progressive and rights-protective language from the agreement, they will certainly feel emboldened to pursue this strategy with other economic agreements and commitments in the future.

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