

## **GERMANY STILL REFUSES TO APOLOGISE FOR GENOCIDE OF HERERO AND NAMA IN NAMIBIA**

*“Luschan also asked a Lieutenant Ralf Zürn, stationed in Okahandja, South-West Africa, just after the massacre of the Hereros by the German colonialists began: “If you are aware of any possible way in which we might acquire a larger number of Herero skulls...” The lieutenant responded that this would be possible “since in the concentration camps taking and preserving the skulls of Herero prisoners of war will be more readily possible than in the country, where there is always a danger of offending the ritual feelings of the natives”.*

Andrew Zimmerman (1)



*The Herero and Nama have brought a legal action in United States on reparations from Germany.*

From all the news we are receiving from Germany, it seems the German government has enormous difficulty in admitting the genocide of the Herero and Nama in the former German colony of South-West Africa and apologising for the genocide and other atrocities committed by German forces in the colony and paying compensation not only for the killings but also for the forceful and illegal confiscation of the property of the Herero and Nama such as land, and cattle. (2)

We have on many occasions expressed our views on several aspects of the basic issues involved in the longstanding dispute between the African peoples of Namibia and their former colonial masters who do not seem to want to acknowledge and bear the consequences of the genocide and other atrocities committed in the German colony, Namibia, previously known as German South West Africa. (3)

This running dispute is remarkable in many ways. No one disputes the basic facts of German actions of genocide. German writers have recorded the events of the genocide of the Herero and Nama. Most readers will remember the infamous extermination command of the notorious and evil Lothar von Trotha on 2 October, 1904:

*'I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero. The Herero are German subjects no longer. They have killed, stolen, cut off the ears and other parts of the body of wounded soldiers, and now are too cowardly to want to fight any longer. I announce to the people that whoever hands me one of the chiefs shall receive 1,000 marks, and 5,000 marks for Samuel Maherero. The Herero nation must now leave the country. If it refuses, I shall compel it to do so with the 'long tube' (cannon). Any Herero found inside the German frontier, with or without gun or cattle, will be executed. I shall spare neither women nor children. I shall give the order to drive them away and fire on them. Such are my words to the Herero people'.*

*The great General of the mighty German Kaiser". Extermination Order by the German commander, General Lothar von Trotha. (4)*



*Post card of German soldiers loading human skulls and bones of massacred Herero into a casket for shipping to German universities, especially, Berlin*



*Postcard indicating who the addresses of the box were: German museums and universities*

The handing over ceremony of further Namibian human remains on 29 July 2018, by the German government to a delegation from Namibia in a church has once more brought to light the difficulties and the emotions that such an event can release and the divergent interests of the two sides. On one hand, the Herero and the Nama whose ancestors were murdered by Germans in what is generally accepted as the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when soldiers of the German Emperor killed some 80,000 Herero and some 10,000 Nama who revolted against confiscation of their land and cattle by German colonists in South-West Africa and on the other hand, the Germans whose predecessors committed the most outrageous crimes and who seem to have great difficulties or are unwilling even to apologise formally for those abominable crimes against African peoples. (5) They have apologised for the crimes of the Nazis against ethnic groups in Europe but seem to have insuperable difficulties to do the same for African peoples who suffered similar murders, exterminations and confiscations through colonialist methods that were later perfected by the national-socialists under the monster, Adolf Hitler and his co-murderers. (6)

Whilst handing over 19 skulls, a scalp and bones to Namibian Minister for Culture, the German Minister of State for international cultural policies in the Foreign Ministry, Michelle Müntefering asked "*for forgiveness from the bottom of my heart*". No one doubts the sincerity of the expression of the German Minister, but personal expressions are not what is required here. We recall the reaction of many Germans to a statement by a previous German Minister when she expressed a regret and made an apology on behalf of the German people for colonial atrocities. (7)



*Surviving Herero returning from Omaheke Desert where they had been driven by German troops after the Battle at Waterberg; two women in front were unable to stand.*

Chief Rukuro, Paramount Chief of the Herero, criticised the holding of the handover ceremony in a church, arguing it should have been held on governmental premises. A similar criticism had also been made earlier by a German historian, Christian Kopp, from the Ngo, *Völkermord verjährt nicht*, (No Amnesty for Genocide) who stated that the handing over should have been in the German Parliament, *Bundestag*, and should have been accompanied by an apology for the German colonial domination.

It is not difficult to agree with criticism of the form and the location of the handover ceremony. We share the view that the ceremony would have been more appropriately held in the German Parliament or some government premises such as the foreign ministry. The tendency to down play the importance of the restitution of human remains is regrettable, given the historical background of the German genocide and the subsequent atrocities of Nazi Germany.

Those who murdered the Herero and Nama were neither cultural workers nor religious aspirants but State military officials. Neither culture nor religion was in dispute. This was the implementation of a deliberate State policy of confiscation and extermination. One should guard against the memory of those killed becoming a subject for the cathedral or the theatre.

Would the Germans have handed over remains of victims of Nazi terror in a church? Is this a religious or political event? Germany and Namibia should both have been represented at the highest level of the State, either by the Namibian President and the German Chancellor or their Foreign Ministers. If the remains had been those of victims of Nazi persecution would they have been handed over to the Culture minister of the State of the victims by a German Culture Minister? Is there an attempt here to gradually reduce the significance of this

highly political event that recalls German's colonial hegemony and its crimes to a cultural or religious matter?

We cannot help feeling that, giving the knowledge of how matters concerning victims of Nazi atrocities are handled, there is here a tendency to reduce or minimize the political significance of such an event when Africans are concerned. How are German youth to view this event? Would they see this event in a church as a strong signal from the German political establishment against political intolerance and racist violence that ended in genocide twice in German history? The highest representatives of the German State seem to keep away from events recalling the German colonial past. Added to all this is the unwillingness to render a formal and official apology for Germany's colonial rule and atrocities.

What is really disturbing is the tendency that has become clear on the part of both German and Namibian governments to sideline the leaders of the Herero and Nama both from the long ongoing discussions between the two governments on reparations, and on appropriate apology. We have already some time ago expressed our strong belief that it is in the interest of the African peoples that in such matters the representatives of the peoples directly concerned should also participate fully in all discussions. (8) Was this not done for the victims of Nazi atrocities? Why not do the same for African peoples? We would suggest to our SWAPO friends to take this issue seriously and avoid undermining thereby the interest of other African peoples who have similar claims. There should be no impression that SWAPO is on the same side as the German Government.

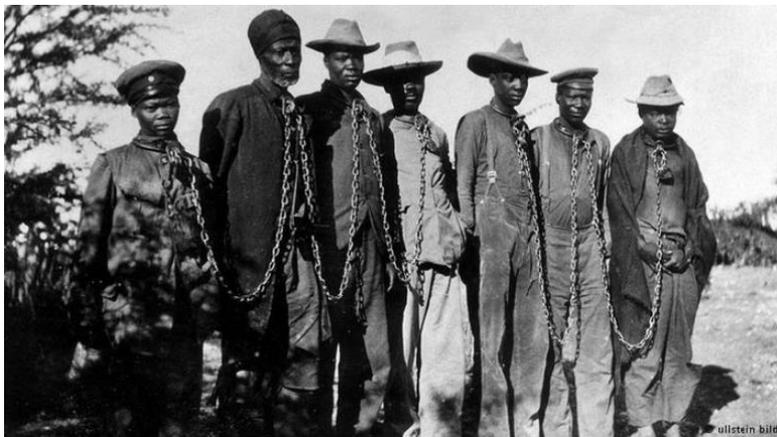


*Vekuii Rukoro, Paramount Chief of the OvaHerero people.*

So far, two years of secret negotiations between the German government and the Namibian government have failed to produce an acceptable statement of apology by the German government and a reparation scheme. What is really dangerous about these negotiations is that they are secret, and no public reports are available on the progress made so far and whether the parties are really negotiating at all. Some people may consider this lack of transparency as evidence of delaying tactics by the German government. The lack of progress in the discussions between the two governments has prompted the Nama and Herero representatives who are not part of the negotiations to bring an action in a US court to seek reparation for genocide in former South West Africa, Namibia and the right to direct participation in the negotiations between Germany and Namibia. (9)

In the first hearings of the court Germany did not appear at all but in the last sitting, Germany represented by lawyers, appeared to plead sovereign immunity and to request dismissal of the action by the Herero and Nama. Court has given Germany time to prepare its response. It should be noted that the genocide was committed in the name of the German State that is now pleading State immunity.

It seems somewhat strange to condemn colonialism, racism and intolerance and still find it difficult to apologise for the atrocities and abominable acts committed in the name of the German Emperor and his people.



*Herero chained by Germans during 1904 rebellion.*

The persistence of evil ideas from the colonial period through the Nazi period to our days, is reaffirmed every day by foreboding incantations and slogans of marauding fascists and neo-Nazi groups in towns such as Chemnitz that make certain areas unsafe for Africans and foreigners. The carrying of anti-Semitic banners and chanting Nazi slogans and paroles do not seem to worry many. This should not leave anybody indifferent. Such events demonstrate that the hateful

ideas that led twice to genocides in German history have not been completely eradicated. Inability or unwillingness even to say 'sorry' for the colonial atrocities in Namibia will clearly not contribute to the eradication of such ideas and their revival by young Germans who believe they have silent support from above and feel emboldened by the attitude of those whose duty it would be to eradicate ideas considered evil and have led to disasters of unmentionable dimensions the very mention of which leave many of us shivering. These uncontrolled menacing groups parade openly in German cities, shouting Nazi paroles and singing Nazi songs, accompanied by Hitler greetings. They should be informed about German emigration to America and Africa, pointing out how a large population of German speakers came to be in Namibia.



*Hendrik Wittooi, Nama hero and leader, 1830-1905.*

Racist ideology is in the belief of supremacy of Europeans that obliged them to steal bones and other body parts of Africans for their dubious scientific experiments during the colonial period and through the Nazi period. What other justification can there be for refusing to return or returning reluctantly and slowly the human remains of Africans looted during the colonial?

The same or similar racist motivation underlies the looting/stealing of African artefacts in the colonial period. Felix von Luschan and his notorious band of ethnologists thought they should collect quickly the artefacts of African and other peoples who, thanks to European interventions, were about to disappear from the face of the earth. Ethnologists supplied the notorious eugenicists like Dr. Eugene Fischer for their dubious scientific experiments in Namibia and in Germany. (10)

Jurgen Zimmerer has underlined the similarities between German colonial methods and those of the Nazi regime in a contribution entitled, “War, Concentration Camps and Genocide in South-West Africa”:

*‘The First German Genocide.’ the similarities between the German atrocities in South West Africa and those of the Nazis:” The genocide in German South-West Africa is also significant as a prelude to the Holocaust. One need only consider notions such as concentration camps and genocide to relate these events to the mass crimes committed during the Third Reich. Although one must be aware of making precipitate comparisons, it cannot be denied that there are actual structural similarities between the genocide committed on the Herero and Nama and the Holocaust which reward further reflection. As less than 40 years elapse between the first and the second genocides carried out by Germans, the lack of a link would be more surprising than its existence.” (11)*

If the Humboldt-Forum has no intention to return looted African artefacts inherited from the Ethnology Museum, Berlin, this is surely largely due to the racist supremacy that has authorised some museums to proclaim themselves ‘universal museums’ and pretend to be holding looted objects on behalf of humanity; they assert without shame that those looted objects are better protected in their museums than in their countries of origin, forgetting to add that many of those objects were not originally intended for displays in museums but to be used by the owners, such as the Oba of Benin, who have been deprived of the artefacts without any compensation for more than hundred years. (12)

The delaying tactics employed to prevent early repatriation of human remains as well as the restitution of looted artefacts are basically the same: argue for more time to study the objects that have been under German control for more than a hundred years (13) The pretence not to know the number and origins of looted artefacts and human remains in German museums is not credible. Whilst ignorance of this kind may appear credible when pleaded by other peoples, this defence does not sit well with a people known for their efficient organization and recording of data under most incredible situations. They cannot ask us to suspend our common sense and our intelligence.

Whether the subject is colonialism, racism or acceptance of asylum seekers and integration of foreigners, the same intolerant ideas rear their ugly heads. Is it the same Germany that refuses to return any of the thousands of looted African artefacts stolen during the colonial period but instead invites the world to admire its looted collections in the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, to see the cultures of the world from Berlin, a city that in many minds stands for the division of the African continent in 1885 and now stands for refusal to return looted African art? That city has been linked to Africa’s woes and the refusal even to apologise

for atrocities in South-West Africa leads many to ask what else is hidden in the dungeons of Berlin and how many Namibian human remains are still in Germany? (14) At the present rate of returns, it would take a couple of hundred years before all Namibian human remains are returned. Can the German authorities refuse forever to do what would seem to most observers the natural and obvious thing to do, as was done for victims of Nazi genocide and abominations?



*The evil Dr. Eugen Fischer whose pseudo-scientific theories of racial purity and superiority were practised on Namibians, at his desk with photos of African women.*

We would expect Germany to do the following:

1. Admit sincerely and honestly, at all levels of German authority and formally in the German Parliament, *Bundestag*, through the *Bundespräsident* or the *Bundeskanzlerin*, that the atrocities committed in South West Africa, now Namibia, against the Herero and Nama between 1904-1908 constitute genocide by all standards and under the 1948 Geneva Convention on Genocide;
2. Issue clear and formal apology for the said genocide and other atrocities from the *Bundespräsident* or the *Bundeskanzlerin* to the Herero and Nama peoples;
3. Undertake formally through the German President, the German Chancellor or the German Parliament to make reparation for the atrocities and confiscations of that period;
4. Ensure that in all discussions on these issues, they will negotiate with the Namibian government as well as the representatives of the Herero and Nama peoples as primary concerned parties;

5. Invite the United Nations and the African Union to attend meetings on these issues as observers;

6. Ensure that payments for reparation for the atrocities against Herero and Nama would not be subsumed under financial assistance for development of Namibia. These sums would be specifically earmarked for the Herero and Nama.

It is very unfortunate, given the known facts of the case, as attested by several documentation, including the writings of German scholars, that the German authorities have prolonged this matter by their refusal to acknowledge the genocide of the Herero and Nama, still refuse to render an apology for the genocide and atrocities, and refuse to make the necessary reparation. Why can Germany not treat the victims of its first genocide the way it treated and treats the victims of its second genocide? It is true though that the one group of victims were Africans whilst the other group were Europeans.

Kwame Opoku.

## **NOTES**

1. Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (2001) p.245.

2. <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2018/august/voelkermord-an-herero-und-nama-es-ist-zeit-fuer-eine-entschuldigung.html>

<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/herero-und-nama-kritik-an-rueckgabezeremonie-historischer-gebeine-an-namibia-a-1225047.html>

[https://www.epo.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14857:kolonialverbrechen-voelkermord-an-herero-und-nama-aufarbeiten&catid=269&Itemid=33](https://www.epo.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14857:kolonialverbrechen-voelkermord-an-herero-und-nama-aufarbeiten&catid=269&Itemid=33)

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<https://www.welt.de/newsticker/news1/article181320786/Voelkermord-Volksgruppen-aus-Namibia-fordern-Entschuldigung-fuer-Kolonialverbrechen.html>

<https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000086126988/deutschland-rahmen-der-rueckgabe-von-gebeinen-an-namibia-in-der>

3. [Return of Stolen Skulls by Germany to Namibia: Closure of A ...](#)

<https://www.modernghana.com/.../return-of-stolen-skulls-by-ger..>

[Have Germans finally acknowledged the Namibian Genocide ...](#)

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[Bones Do Not Die: Germans to Return Namibian Skulls.](#)

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[When Will Germany Finally Return All the Namibian Bones?](#)

<https://www.modernghana.com/.../when-will-germany-finally-ret..>

[Kwame Opoku – Will Namibian Bones Haunt Germans forever? ...](#)

<https://www.toncremers.nl/kwame-opoku-will-namibian-bones-h..>

4. *Vernichtungsbefehl* (Extermination Order) by the German commander, General Lothar von Trotha. Kommando der Schutztruppe. J. Nr. 3737. "Ich, der große General der deutschen Soldaten, sende diesen Brief an das Volk der Herero. Die Herero sind nicht mehr deutsche Untertanen. Sie haben gemordet und gestohlen, haben verwundeten Soldaten Ohren und Nasen und andere Körperteile abgeschnitten, und wollen jetzt aus Feigheit nicht mehr kämpfen.

*Ich sage dem Volk: Jeder, der einen der Kapitäne an eine meiner Stationen als Gefangenen abliefern, erhält tausend Mark, wer Samuel Maharero bringt, erhält fünftausend Mark. Das Volk der Herero muss jedoch das Land verlassen. Wenn das Volk dies nicht tut, so werde ich es mit dem Groot Rohr dazu zwingen. Innerhalb der Deutschen Grenzen wird jeder Herero mit und ohne Gewehr, mit oder ohne Vieh erschossen, ich nehme keine Weiber oder Kinder mehr auf, treibe sie zu ihrem Volke zurück, oder lasse auf sie schießen. Dies sind meine Worte an das Volk der Herero. Der große General des mächtigen Deutschen Kaisers." <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero\\_and\\_Namaqua\\_Genocide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero_and_Namaqua_Genocide)*

5. [Tears, anger as Germany returns human remains seized from Namibia ...https://www.aljazeera.com/.../tears-anger-germany-returns-human...](https://www.aljazeera.com/.../tears-anger-germany-returns-human...) [Germany returns human remains from Namibia genocide | News | DW ...https://www.dw.com/.../germany...human-remains...namibia.../](https://www.dw.com/.../germany...human-remains...namibia.../) [a-..Germany hands over skulls of colonial victims to Namibia | Financial ...https://www.ft.com/.../a60dc444-ab9e-11e8-94bd-cba20d67390c](https://www.ft.com/.../a60dc444-ab9e-11e8-94bd-cba20d67390c) [Germany returns skulls of Namibian genocide victims - BBC News https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45342586](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45342586) [Germany to return human remains from Namibian genocide | CGTN ...https://africa.cgtn.com](https://africa.cgtn.com) > Africa Liv

[Namibia: Germany Returns Human Remains From Namibia Genocide ...https://allafrica.com/stories/201808290592.html](https://allafrica.com/stories/201808290592.html) [Germany returns skulls from colonial-era massacre to Namibia | Reuters https://www.reuters.com/...germany-namibia/germany-returns-sk..](https://www.reuters.com/...germany-namibia/germany-returns-sk..) [Germany to Return Remains - But Not Sorry for Namibia Genocide ... https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00063443.html](https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00063443.html)

Interview of Vekuii Rukoro, Paramount Chief of the OvaHerero people <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmTibG-9QmY>

6. Continuities between German colonialist practices and Nazi practices have been underlined by many authors. Whether German colonialism was a step towards National Socialism or not is not my main concern here. I am only arguing for the need for compensation and equal treatment. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that most of the basic characteristics of the atrocious and

evil practices of the Nazi system were already practised in the German colony of South West Africa: concentration camps, pass system and racial oppression, eugenicist ideas and practices of racial selection, territorial expansion and confiscation of property, such as land or cattle, without compensation. See Pascal Grosse, 'What does German Colonialism Have to do with National Socialism?' in Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz and Lora Wildenthal (eds.), *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 2005, pp. 115-134. See also the pages of freiburg-postcolonial.de, <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/einleitung.htm> Is Germany's extermination program for black Africans, a template for the Holocaust? EDWIN BLACK

7. See annex I.

8. K. Opoku, [Have Germans finally acknowledged the Namibian genocide ...https://www.pambazuka.org/.../have-germans-finally-acknowledg...](https://www.pambazuka.org/.../have-germans-finally-acknowledg...) [How Long Must Africans Still Wait to Be Able to Bury Their Dead ...https://www.modernghana.com/.../how-long-must-africans-still-w...](https://www.modernghana.com/.../how-long-must-africans-still-w...)

9. [Herero and Nama groups sue Germany over Namibia genocide - BBC ...https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38530594](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38530594)  
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[Germany sued for reparations over colonial-era genocide in Namibiahttps://www.telegraph.co.uk > News](https://www.telegraph.co.uk > News)  
[Namibia's Herero and Nama people sue Germany over their ancestors ...https://qz.com/.../namibias-herero-and-nama-people-sue-germany...](https://qz.com/.../namibias-herero-and-nama-people-sue-germany...)

10. K. Opoku, [Return of stolen skulls by Germany to Namibia: Closure of a horrible ... https://www.pambazuka.org/.../return-stolen-skulls-germany-nam...](https://www.pambazuka.org/.../return-stolen-skulls-germany-nam...)  
Gretchen E. Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide-Anthropology in the Third Reich*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2004. A very interesting book on the pseudo-science of Dr. Eugen Fischer and Dr. Josef Mengele and co

11. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa*, Merlin Press, 2007, p 59.

12. It was correctly stated in a symposium of the Berlin Academy of Arts that the belief in the superiority of the Europeans is the basis of European colonialism. This feeling continues today and appears also in daily racism.

*‘Eine entscheidende Grundlage des Kolonialismus ist das europäische Verständnis kultureller Überlegenheit. Diese eng mit dem Rassismus zusammenhängende Konstellation wirkt bis in die Gegenwart, bildet trotz der Emanzipation der Kolonien aus der europäischen Paternalisierung immer noch den Kern populistischer Bewegungen. Der alltägliche Rassismus, die schleichende Gewalt der Fremdbestimmung stellen ein gravierendes Problem für Millionen von Europäern dar, die aufgrund ihrer Hautfarbe, ihres Namens, ihrer Religion oder ihrer Traditionen diskriminiert werden. ‘*

<https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000086126988/deutschland-rahmen-der-rueckgabe-von-gebeinen-an-namibia-in-der>

13. The delaying tactic adopted by Germany for the restitution of looted artefacts is to produce a set of draft rules for handling objects from colonial contexts that will probably be finalized next spring after a workshop involving foreign experts. Those rules allow each museum to decide whether there is or is not a case for restitution. There is no legally binding rule or political decision on restitution and so each object will be decided individually. Whilst this may afford Germany some delay time, it is in the long run not the most efficient way to deal with the issues of principle involved in the subject of restitution of looted African artefacts. This approach is no doubt based on the practice and ideas of museums such as the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The two museums do not seem to have understood the African anger and determination to recover our artefacts. They have not understood that their seemingly pragmatic and opportunistic approach, devoid of any decision of principle, will only prolong discussions on restitution which in turn bring out all the useless and mendacious arguments the Western museums put forth that annoy many Africans and show Western insensitivity and lack of respect for historical facts of looting and plundering as well as for the intelligence of their African interlocutors. At the latest, when the Savoy-Sarr report on restitution of African artefacts in France is presented in November to President Macron, others will realize how useful it is to have a political decision on the principle of restitution; there will not be a general discussion on each and every item as the director of the Victoria and Albert museum suggested. Think of the thousands of looted artefacts in most European museums.

14. How many human remains of Namibian origin are still in Germany?

*We do not know how many skulls (or other human remains) have been sent to Europe from the area of today's Namibia. Neither do we know how many skulls may still be held in collections in Germany. This is difficult to say as collections are very diverse (e.g., owned by museums, universities, private persons) and as there is no central institution overlooking or governing such collections. Charité still investigates its own collections, and we are currently investigating the provenance of some more skulls possibly stemming from Namibia. As soon as we know with sufficient certainty that they are from Namibia, we will inform the Namibian embassy. [Restitution of Namibian skulls 2011: Fächerverbund Anatomie ...https://anatomie.charite.de](https://anatomie.charite.de) > ... > [Restitution of Namibian skulls 2011](#)*

## **ANNEX I**

SPEECH BY THE FEDERAL MINISTER HEIDEMARIE WIECZOREK-ZEUL AT THE COMMERMORATIONS OF THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE SUPPRESSION OF THE HERERO UPRISING, OKAKARARA, ON 14 AUGUST 2004. <http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/Vertretung/windhuk/en/Startseite.html> Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul  
Federal Minister for Economic Co-operation and Development

It is an honour to have been invited to take part in your commemorations here today. I would like to thank you for giving me, as the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and as a representative of the German government and the German parliament, this opportunity to speak to you. Yet I am also here to listen to you.

Acknowledging the atrocities of 1904

Today, I want to acknowledge the violence inflicted by the German colonial powers on your ancestors, particularly the Herero and the Nama. I am painfully aware of the atrocities committed: in the late 19th century, the German colonial powers drove the people from their land. When the Herero, when your ancestors, resisted, General von Trotha's troops embarked on a war of extermination against them and the Nama. In his infamous order General Trotha commanded that every Herero be shot – with no mercy shown even to women and children.

After the battle of Waterberg in 1904, the survivors were forced into the Omaheke desert, where they were denied any access to water sources and were left to die of thirst and starvation.

Following the uprisings, the surviving Herero, Nama and Damara were interned in camps and put to forced labour of such brutality that many did not survive.

Respect for the fight for freedom

We pay tribute to those brave women and men, particularly from the Herero and the Nama, who fought and suffered so that their children and their children's children could live in freedom.

I remember with great respect your ancestors who died fighting against their German oppressors.

Even at that time, back in 1904, there were also Germans who opposed and spoke out against this war of oppression. One of them was August Bebel, the chairman of the same political party of which I am a member. In the German parliament, Bebel condemned the oppression of the Herero in the strongest terms and honoured their uprising as a just struggle for liberation. I am proud of that today.

Plea to forgive

A century ago, the oppressors – blinded by colonialist fervour – became agents of violence, discrimination, racism and annihilation in Germany's name.

The atrocities committed at that time would today be termed genocide – and nowadays a General von Trotha would be prosecuted and convicted.

We Germans accept our historical and moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time.

And so, in the words of the Lord's Prayer that we share, I ask you to forgive us our trespasses.

Without a conscious process of remembering, without sorrow, there can be no reconciliation – remembrance is the key to reconciliation.

2004 is a year of commemorations but it should also be a year of reconciliation.

Today, we honour the dead. Those who fail to remember the past become blind to the present.

By remembering the past, we should gain strength for the present and the future.

A shared vision of freedom and justice

Namibia's independence grew out of the determination and courage of the people of Namibia and the vision you share with your ancestors. The people of Namibia have every reason to be proud of these fourteen years of independence.

The vision that you and we share of a more just, peaceful and more humane world is based on rejecting the overcoming chauvinist power politics and all forms of apartheid. We share the vision of those who fought for freedom and dignity or against discrimination of any kind: a vision of freedom, justice, mutual respect and human rights. By gaining independence, the people of Namibia have won the chance to realise that vision. I am pleased and proud that a great deal of support was also forthcoming from my own country for this struggle for independence and beyond.

Committed to support and assist

Germany has learned the bitter lessons of history: We are a country that is open to the world and has in many ways become multicultural. We have achieved German reunification in a peaceful manner and enjoy being part of the enlarged European Union. We are a committed member of the United Nations, working for world-wide peace, human rights, development and poverty reduction. We provide sustained assistance to the people of Africa and strongly support the NEPAD initiative.

Accepting our special historical responsibility towards Namibia, we wish to continue our close partnership at all levels. Germany is looking to the future and wishes to help Namibia tackle the challenges of development. This applies in particular to assistance for the necessary process of land reform.

I hope very much for all of us that this cultural centre in Okakarara will be a place for Germans and Namibians to talk and exchange views on our past and on our future. From the unhappy past that this place has witnessed, let us draw the strength to create a bright future in peace and friendship.

As Bishop Kameeta said in an interview, at a time of faceless globalisation we must tell people loud and clear that there is hope for the world and make people aware that this world and our planet cannot survive by concentrating all the work in a few hands and a few countries but by sharing resources across the whole world and ensuring that the world population has equal access to these resources.

And so, in that spirit of hope, we share a commitment to a fairer world, to better living conditions here and in all parts of our world.