

Ambassador Neville Gertze

**Farewell Speech on the occasion of the
opening of the exhibition**

***Namibia - The Hard Walk to Independence*
by Guenay Ulutunçok**

**at the
Rotes Rathaus, Berlin
10 February 2015**

Sehr geehrter Bundespräsident a.D., **Dr. Horst Köhler**,
sehr geehrte **Frau Dunger-Löper**, stellvertretende Leiterin der Senatskanzlei Berlin,
sehr geehrter Ministerialdirektor **Dr. von Goetze**,
meine Damen und Herren,
liebe Freunde und Freundinnen Namibias,

der wie wir in Namibia zu sagen pflegen:

ALL PROTOCOL OBSERVED

Ich freue mich sehr, dass Sie so zahlreich erschienen sind. Es ist mir eine besonders große Ehre, dass ich Sie, Herr Dr. Köhler auch unter meinen Gästen begrüßen darf, um gemeinsam mit Frau Dunger-Löper und mir bei der heutigen Ausstellungseröffnung des Kölner Fotografen Guenay Ulutunçok, ***Namibia - Der schwere Weg in die Unabhängigkeit***, hier im Roten Rathaus dabei zu sein.

Gleichzeitig möchte ich diesen Anlass auch nutzen, um mich von Ihnen, von Berlin und allen Freunden Namibias nach sechs Jahren Amtszeit zu verabschieden. Dazu jedoch ein wenig später. Zunächst möchte ich Informationen und einige Gedanken mit Ihnen über die Ausstellung im Rundgang teilen. Dies tue ich gerne in Englisch, da ich mich von berufs wegen wieder daran gewöhnen muss, hauptsächlich Englisch zu sprechen:

Dear Ladies, dear Sirs,

Unfortunately and much to my regret, I was not familiar until last year with the work of the award-winning Cologne-based photo journalist Guenay Ulutunçok. I never knew he had spent the transition years from 1988 to 1989 in Namibia, and again from 1990 until 1991 had travelled throughout Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Angola with his camera. Only recently did I learn of his treasure of a private Africa archive of 50.000 photos of which about 9000 were taken in Namibia. A fair share of these relate to the final years of our

struggle for national independence. Today we see only a small but nevertheless very powerful fraction of these reminders of a period in our most recent history.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Most of you are aware that on 21 March 2015, Namibia will celebrate 25 Years of Independence. The new government, which was elected on 28 November 2014, will be sworn in, and President-elect, HE Dr. Hage Geingob, will succeed the current President, HE Hifikepunye Pohamba, after 10 years in office.

A Jubilee Year is the perfect moment to critically assess where we as government were successful, what we could have done better, and where the focus of government policy should lie in the future.

We can proudly state that Namibia has enjoyed 25 years of peace, stability, and democracy. As the President-elect reminded us in his first public announcement on 02 February 2015, after winning the Presidential elections with a resounding mandate of 87% of the vote: (and I quote) "Namibia is a 'Child of International Solidarity', friend to all, enemy to none" (end of quote) - I dare say that this is not a small thing in a world where tension, conflicts, terror, racism and tribalism, 'hot' and 'cold' wars are on the increase.

Dear friends,

Bear with me that at this point in time, I do not wish to anticipate what our new and able leadership will say and do, once it assumes office in March. However, what I can reveal is that there is a lot of busy planning going on. HE Dr. Hage Geingob is a firm believer in good and timely planning. In his address he said (and I quote): "We are bringing the future into the present so that we are ready to face the challenges and expectations that await us" (end of quote).

However, while looking ahead, the President-elect also attaches much importance to greater historic contexts - after all, history is never just another closed chapter, or as William Faulkner once said: "The past is never dead. It is not even past"; and one of your great novelists – die Berlinerin Christa Wolf – fügte hinzu: "Wir trennen uns ab und stellen uns fremd." ("We cut ourselves off from the past; we pretend to be strangers.")

Even though we sometimes yearn for that cut and prefer to look ahead, history has taught us that there is no clean break - there is no fresh start - das es sie nicht gibt und niemals geben wird – diese "Stunde Null". (That a "zero hour" does not exist and will never exist).

Your late President von Weizsäcker, in his 08th of May speech in the Bundestag during the 1985 Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of War in Europe and of National-Socialist Tyranny, shared this wisdom when he admonished his people not to see the end of the war (and I quote) "as the cause of flight, expulsion and deprivation of freedom. The cause goes back to the start of the tyranny that brought about war. We must

not separate 8 May 1945 from 30 January 1933.” (end of quote) In this context, he regarded the 8th of May as a day of liberation, and he said (I quote) “It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National-Socialist regime.” (end of quote)

Mr Ulutunçok’s exhibition reminds us of the harmful legacy we in Namibia inherited, and the momentous task we were confronted with on 21 March 1990 – the day of **OUR** liberation from centuries of colonialism and institutionalised fascism and racism.

Mr Ulutunçok’s high-quality photos take us back to the last years on Namibia’s Hard Walk to Independence, thematically focusing on social and political issues such as:

1. Namibians of German descent and their relationship with the black majority population;
2. the living-conditions of black Namibians;
3. the role of the Catholic church;
4. the struggle for independence through protests and resistance across the country;
5. at long last the return to the motherland after 25 years in exile; and
6. finally, the elections and the realisation of Namibia’s independence.

The exhibition begins with the photo of the classic example of German colonial subjugation, the infamous **Horse Rider**, and at a later stage shows in an impressive way the taking over of this symbol of conquest by the black majority that was oppressed and tyrannised first under German colonial rule, and then disenfranchised, abused and suppressed by Apartheid South Africa. It also shows people determined to reclaim their history in an act of defiance and resistance.

The exhibition brings back a lot of memories:

- the ignoble self-righteousness and sense of superiority in a section of our society indoctrinated by the inhumane system of fascism and racism;
- the legal and unpunished glorification of German National-Socialism until late into the 1980s, symbolized, for example, by the full-page obituary for the Hitler deputy Rudolf Hess in the Allgemeine Zeitung in 1987; or
- the hoisting of the Reichskriegsflagge - the Imperial German War Flag - this ugly symbol of colonial, belligerent occupation, and German National-Socialism - until late into 1988; and
- the shock of the German Ambassador Hanns Schumacher in 1995, who served in Namibia from 1993 to 1997, in response to the open hostility of a significant number of German-Namibians towards his idea to screen the film “Anne Frank” in Windhoek.

Looking back, we should be honest and admit that “**the good old days**” never existed - certainly not for black people, but also not for white people, as the exhibition so clearly depicts. I should hope that once we are ready to see that, we are ready to face the consequences with due responsibility.

When I look at some of the photos and read the captions, I wonder what the white elite thought of “us” black people, still shortly before we gained independence, and I ask myself whether they were afraid of “us” – their alleged enemies – taking revenge for all the atrocities that were committed in the name of “separate development” – this euphemism for what the United Nations called a “crime against humanity”?

I wonder, have they realized their wrongs and do they regret them? Or is their past something they rather not be reminded of?

Do they engage in society while reaping the fruits of democracy, peace, and stability that the Namibian government with the help of the international community brought to them?

Did they consider the 21st of March 1990 as a day of defeat, or rather as the end of an aberration in Namibian history, “an end bearing seeds of hope” - to again quote your late President von Weizsäcker.

And I wonder, have we lived up to our responsibility as democrats in a democratic society to show them that the 21st of March 1990 also liberated them from inhumanity and tyranny?

While I fail to answer these questions, I believe that we as government planted the seeds of hope when our Founding Father, HE Dr Sam Nujoma, introduced the policy of reconciliation. As uncompleted as the process still is, it opened the doors for all of us to become part of a community of people living together under the rule of law, which honours human dignity, equality and freedom from discrimination, prohibits slavery and forced labour and guarantees basic freedoms.

“Namibia is still a country divided along tribal lines. No one can deny that”, said the President-elect in July 2014. For clarifications sake, I wish to stress that in Namibia the term “tribe” does not only apply to African ethnic groups as it does in Europe; in Namibia, when we make use of the term, it also includes our German and Afrikaans speaking tribes.

In that very same speech, my President-elect, HE Dr. Geingob, then continued to quote the editor-in-chief of the South-Sudan News Agency, Duop Chak Wuol, who shared a universal truth with us, and I wholeheartedly agree: “Tribalism is a mental prison...and pride of identity coupled with arrogance is one of the leading factors that limit one’s ability to abandon it.”

Dear Ladies, dear Sirs,

We must all remember that the extended hand of reconciliation, just like democracy, must never be taken for granted. We all have to actively take part in shaping our future as responsible human beings, and understand that

“We are all one by creation, bound together as limbs in a body, if one part aches, the rest will suffer as well.”

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Köhler,
meine Damen und Herren,
liebe Freunde und Freundinnen,

zwar habe ich bereits lange genug gesprochen, aber ich möchte es mir zum Schluss meiner Rede nicht nehmen lassen, meine wenigen Abschiedsworte an Sie in Deutsch zu richten:

Am Freitag, den 13. Februar 2015 werde ich zusammen mit meiner Ehefrau Amy, nach sechs Jahren interessanter und anspruchsvoller Tätigkeiten nach Namibia zurück kehren, wo eine neue Aufgabe auf mich wartet.

Es war mir eine große Ehre und Freude die Beziehungen zwischen der Republik Namibia und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland mit gestalten zu dürfen.

Ihnen allen danke ich für Ihre unschätzbare Unterstützung:

Ihnen Herr Dr. Köhler danke ich für Ihr großes Engagement bei der Intensivierung der Zusammenarbeit unserer beiden Länder und der Länder Afrikas sowie für Ihre bahnbrechende Rede im März 2014, *Von der Unmöglichkeit, über Afrika zu sprechen*; deren Lektüre ich Ihnen allen, sehr verehrte Damen und Herren, ans Herz lege. Sie finden Sie nach wie vor auf der ersten Seite unserer Web-Seite (www.namibia-botschaft.de).

Ihnen, Frau Dunger-Löper und Frau Strunk, danke ich für die vielen Jahre der guten und verlässlichen Zusammenarbeit der Senatskanzlei bei der Vertiefung der Städtepartnerschaft zwischen Windhoek und Berlin.

Ich danke Herr Ulutunçok für die wunderbare Ausstellung und die freundschaftliche Zusammenarbeit sowie das Angebot, diese Ausstellung und relevante Fotos der Regierung von Namibia zu überlassen.

Den Bundestagsabgeordneten, Honorarkonsuln, Freunden und Freundinnen Namibias, den NGOs, danke ich für die Herausbildung eines besseren Verständnisses der Menschen füreinander – sowohl hier in Deutschland als auch in Namibia und für die Bemühungen, die spezifischen Herausforderungen in unseren Beziehungen immer wieder kenntlich zu machen und zu meistern.

I wholeheartedly thank my team at the Embassy for six years of capable support, and above all, I thank my wife Amy, without whom I would not have been able to enjoy and master the challenges that came with being the Namibian Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren, liebe Freunde und Freundinnen, einen letzten Satz gestatten Sie mir:

Ich appelliere an Ihren Gerechtigkeitssinn, Ihr Verständnis und Ihr Feingefühl, hinsichtlich der noch offenen Fragen unseres kolonialen Erbes, das uns Deutschland in Namibia ungebeten hinterlassen hat. Wir – das ist die Republik Namibia und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland – wünschen uns gesunde, harmonische und erfolgreiche bilaterale Beziehungen. Jedoch – um vorwärts gehen zu können, müssen wir unsere Kräfte konsolidieren und auf tatsächlicher Augenhöhe dieses dunkelste Kapitel unserer historischen Beziehungen gemeinsam angehen.

- Augenhöhe bedeutet immer gegenseitiger Respekt.
- Augenhöhe bedeutet Akzeptanz oder Annahme der verschiedenen Narrative.
- Augenhöhe bedeutet die Anerkennung der großen Opfer unzähliger Kinder, Frauen und Männer während des Genozids an Herero, Nama und Damara und die Realisierung, dass dieser Völkermord ein gesellschaftliches Trauma geschaffen hat.

Erst wenn Augenhöhe all dies bedeutet können wir darauf hoffen, einen konstruktiven Dialog zu entwickeln.

Ich würde die Bundesrepublik Deutschland gerne in dem guten Glauben verlassen, dass wir diese große Aufgabe gemeinsam schaffen –, auf bilateraler wie auf zwischenmenschlicher Ebene.

Ich danke Ihnen ganz herzlich und wünsche Ihnen eine gesunde, friedliche und aktive Zukunft.