
PRESS STATEMENT ON REPARATION

FOR THE 1904 – 1908 GENOCIDE COMMITTED BY
IMPERIAL GERMANY

ON THE HERERO AND NAMA PEOPLE/NATIONS



17 FEBRUARY 2016

UNITED NATIONS PLAZA, KATUTURA

Members of the media,
Esteemed fellow traditional leaders,
Members of our communities,
Ladies and gentlemen

Allow us to start this press statement by reading you the two extermination orders as they were issued by General Lothar Von Trotha in 1904 and 1905 against the Herero and Nama people, respectively.

EXTERMINATION ORDERS/VERNICHTUNGSBEFEHL

“I, the Great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero...The Herero people must leave the land. If they do not do this I will force them with the Groot Rohr [Cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. These are my words to the Herero people.” Signed: The Great General of the Mighty Kaiser, Von Trotha, 02 October 1904 at Ozombuzovindimba 20 km east of Otjinene, Omaheke Region.

Let me now turn to the second order issued by the same General against another group of modern day Namibia, our Nama brothers and sisters.

On 22 April 1905 the same Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha sent a message to the Nama people/Nation saying: *“The Nama who chooses not to surrender and lets himself be seen in German territory will be shot, until all are exterminated.*

Those who at the start of the rebellion committed murder against whites or have commanded that whites be murdered have by law, forfeited their lives. As for the few not defeated, it will fare with them as it fared with the Herero, who in their blindness also believed that they could make war successfully on the powerful German Emperor and the great German people. I ask you, where are the Herero today?”

Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

This is the basis on which our two communities are joined. They suffered the same consequences during the German colonial era, GENOCIDE AT THE HANDS OF IMPERIAL GERMANY. No other group in Namibia can claim to have faced a similar fate that these two communities endured at the hands of the Germans because they dared to resist the colonisation of the country. Let me also dare to say, no other group in Namibia would claim to have lost a percentage of their population during the anti-colonial wars of resistance which would come remotely close to the losses suffered by these two groups.

The extent of losses suffered by these two communities were a direct consequence of the intent and a written policy of Imperial Germany to wipe them off the face of the earth. This is what constitutes the genocide against them, and them only in the context of Namibia were affected by the German

genocide, hence their quest for reparation as a form of restorative justice AND a basis for genuine and lasting Reconciliation between Germany and Namibia.

Let us now look at what happened; by the end of 1907 about 65,000 of the 80,000 Ovaherero people had been slaughtered; some of them in battles, the majority poisoned, while others were tortured to death in concentration camps and elsewhere, as can be seen from the cover letter to this very press statement. Those who survived the brutal and genocidal German onslaught were driven into the Kalahari Desert where they died of hunger and thirst. Only 15,000 Herero people survived the German extermination order, mostly those who fled to Botswana and South Africa.

In 1905 the Legendary Nama Leader, Captain Hendrik Witbooi thought it was time to join the war, which they in true love for their motherland did. The same fate befell the Nama people and by the end of the year 1907, about 10,000 Nama people were brutally slaughtered in the German genocide directed at them. Some of them died in battles and in concentration camps while others died on their way as they also fled to South Africa and Botswana.

Members of the media, fellow traditional leaders, ladies and gentlemen,

It is this sad reality which inspired some of our previous leaders to start the genocide and reparation movement as we know it today as they became aware of remedies available to victims of the type of crimes committed against our ancestors. It was not an easy task at all, one must admit but the conviction and vision of great leaders like the late Dr Kuaima Riruako inspired us all to join

this movement. In the early days when the whole concept of genocide and reparation was not understood, it was the dream and hope of this great leader which kept the movement alive. These communities were left to fight alone and that they did until this matter became easy for everyone to understand. Here are some of the landmark as these communities, almost exclusively carried the banner of the redemption of the blood of their ancestors:

- In 1995 The Victim Communities staged a demonstration to the visiting German Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl and demanded reparations,
- In 1998 another demonstration was staged when German President Dr. Roman Herzog visited Namibia,
- In the early 2000s the late Paramount Chief Riruako – filed a court case in a US court against Germany and some of the German enterprises,
- In early 2000s the Genocide Committees were established and have since then been pushing the Government of Germany to give a formal apology and pay reparations for the Genocides committed,
- In 2004 the Ovaherero community commemorated the 100th anniversary of the German genocide against its ancestors,
- In the following year, 2005, the Nama community commemorated the 100th anniversary of the German genocide against its ancestors,
- In 2006 the late Paramount Chief Riruako tabled the Genocide Motion in the National Assembly which was unanimously adopted as a RESOLUTION for the Namibian Government to implement – NOT to violate as is happening under the current administration!

Now, one thing that is important to note here is that in all these attempts, which covered a period of over 10 years, these communities were left to fight

this battle on their own. The unanimous adoption of that Resolution in our National Assembly in support of the victims of the German genocides in Namibia gave us hope that finally help would have arrived. It is important to quote directly from that resolution as that would become apparent later. The National Assembly resolved that (and I quote verbatim):

- i. "That what happened to our people during the 1904 to 1908 as a result of General Von Trotha's Extermination Orders was a brutal act of GENOCIDE sanctioned by the German Government of the day.*
- ii. That our people are ENTITLED to demand the payment of reparations from the German Government.*
- iii. That the Namibian Government should be AN INTERESTED PARTY in any discussions between its nationals and the German Government on the issue of reparations.*
- iv. That a dialogue be convened between, on the one hand, the German Government and on the other hand, the Namibian Government and representatives of the affected parties to try and resolve this matter amicably and thereby strengthening and solidifying the existing excellent relationship between the two countries (Germany and Namibia)."*

The adoption of this resolution in parliament gave our communities renewed hope that finally we now had the support of our own government. It also bolstered our resolves as victims of these genocides that at long last, the voice of our own government will now be recorded alongside ours as we push the German government to own up to its genocidal deeds against our ancestors. Our determination to continue with our demand for reparation from the

German government was further emboldened by, what one could term the operationalisation of this National Assembly resolution by our government, when the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Honourable Utoni Nuyoma said the following:

- i. *“The Namibian Government believes that national reconciliation can be hindered significantly if the issues are not addressed in the comprehensive manner. This is primarily because omitting this relevant chapter of our history may lead to future tensions between Namibians and German nationals as well as domestically between German speaking and non-German speaking Namibians.”*
- ii. *“Despite the ‘Special Relationship’, tension exists on both the German and Namibian sides because of this issue. Both sides would benefit very little if this dark chapter of our history is merely closed without any remedial outcome. Both Namibia and Germany will greatly gain if the two countries constructively engage and work towards an amicable solution.”*
- iii. *“... We see the role of the Namibian Government as a MEDIATOR between the German Government and the affected communities and we do wish to facilitate a process of reconciliation. I would also like to reiterate that the Namibian Government cannot work against the interests of its people, ...”*

Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

The letter and spirit of both the National Assembly resolution and the statement by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Honourable Utoni Nujoma, on the 19th September 2011 continue to be the basis on which we view the involvement of our government in the matter of the genocide of our ancestors

and the reparation we are seeking. One must also add here that both the resolution of the National Assembly and the Ministerial Statement are squarely in line with international conventions, protocols and State practice dealing with the subject matter at hand.

We have however, seen a nasty and shocking turn of events of late with our government having adopted an approach that is not only alienating the very victims it must assist, but which is running against all conceivable instruments it has to rely on to take on the German government if it were to pursue reparation for the above genocides.

By adopting the strategy it has (of excluding the representatives/leaders of the two communities that were DIRECTLY affected by the German genocides), the Namibian government is not only ACTIVELY working against the victims of these genocides, it is also in flagrant violation of the National Assembly Resolution (which actually constitutes the legal basis of its mandate and locus standi in the reparations discussions), it contradicts the well-articulated position of the Executive Branch of government by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs , which by any standard represents a comprehensive, definitive and correct interpretation of the National Assembly Resolution. Worst of all, the current stance of Government to exclude the affected communities and to usurp their heritage, runs counter to all international conventions and protocols on genocide and reparation.

We take particular exception to our exclusion for something that concerns us so deeply and for which we have shed so much sweat. As we say: NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US; ANYTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US IS AGAINST US.

Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

You might be aware that the Namibian government has recently announced the appointment of a highly respected elder member of our community, Dr. Zedekia Ngavirue. The government has also created a structure that would consolidate its position on which basis it is going to engage its German counterpart. Both these initiatives we must add, were done without the consultation or input from us the victim communities. This does not only raise suspicions about our government's real motives, but also about the content of what would eventually be negotiated on with the Germans.

We are happy to have our government play a role as we the victims negotiate with the German government. Such a role should be agreed upon between us, the victim communities and our government. We will however, never surrender our right to demand reparation from the German government to anyone, not even our own government. If the German government is prepared to pay compensation for the effects of colonialism, then these communities would be happy to join other communities in rallying behind our government. Genocide is however, something else – for which we the leadership of the victim communities shall be directly involved. This is a serious matter in which we have lost a total of no less than 75,000 Ovahereros and Namas at the hands of the brutal German schuttruppe. The consequences of these genocides continue to define the very existence, poverty and marginalisation of our people. Therefore nobody else, but ourselves shall

define the package of reparation for the losses that our ancestors and WE have suffered and continue to suffer. The destiny of our future generations will remain in our own hands as a People and as Traditional Leaders.

We have written two letters to the Presidency, to which we are still to receive answers. In the one letter we request for an audience with the President, while in the other letter we provided reasons why we could not see ourselves participating in a process whose final product we would have no control over whatsoever.

Our position therefore, is very clear, WE ARE NOT GOING TO PARTICIPATE in the current structure that the government created to replace the victim communities and take their place at the negotiation table with the Germans. We reject the Government structure in totality as an unfit and illegitimate to represent of our interests. These communities are going to continue seeking to have a dialogue with our government in the hope of finding an amicable solution. However, we shall remain focused on the goal that we set out to achieve, which is DIRECT negotiations with the German Government in order to receive reparations for the genocides it committed against our people. We stand ready to, should it become necessary, intensify our campaign to get the German government to the negotiating table with the victim groups directly.

To the German government we say the following: You have obligations under international protocols and conventions to deal with us directly. If you for reasons known to yourself think that you can pay our reparation through a proxy and on terms not agreed with us, know from this day onward that you

are doing that at your own risk because our demand for reparations would continue and will in NO WAY be cancelled or nullified by dealing with an unauthorized agent!

NOW, let me express our WILLINGNESS TO FIND AN AMICABLE SOLUTION: We are ready to engage our Government and the German government on the way forward on the basis on the National Assembly Resolution and the UN Convention on Genocide which both countries have acceded to without reservations.

BUT if our Government continues with its DUBIOUS scheme of puppet Vorster-type advisory TECHNICAL COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, SPECIAL ENVOY, ETC, we are equally ready to put our Programme of Massive Positive Action into action, to protect our rights and fight for our interests.

Fellow victims of the genocides go back to your villages, towns, cities and places of employment, and BE READY FOR ACTION. Unless of reasonable and peaceful demand for democratic inclusion and participation in our own case is granted, we shall have no option but to do what oppressed people all over the world throughout history has done: TO BECOME OUR OWN LIBERATORS!!!

If we cannot be allowed to peacefully negotiate our reparations with the German Government which is willing and ready to sit down with us, then we are left no choice but to launch our own self-help reparations program to satisfy the needs of our people. Yes, there will be chaos, but the author of that chaos is, this time not the Commander-in-Chief of the German Armed Forces, but the Commander-in-Chief of the Namibian Defence Force!

Remember: our People will NOT DO anything that is unlawful; they will simply act consistent with a STATE OF NATIONAL DEFENCE! Our people are ready to pay supreme sacrifices for what is rightfully theirs. This time, we shall NOT flee to any neighbouring country!

Oretoveni, Matutirero!!!