

Thank you for taking your time to receive this petition asking your government to apologize and pay reparations. To us, the OvaHerero and Nama people, your gesture to open your embassy door is greatly appreciated and gives us hope for future conversations about this issue. It is worth noting that about 25% to 35% of the petitioners are German people. We hope your representatives in Berlin will respond to our visit in the same spirit.

For the past four weeks, we have asked people of goodwill to sign this petition to urge your government to open the door and speak with OvaHerero and Nama community leaders about the genocide that our ancestors experienced. Over 80% of the OvaHerero people were systematically killed by the German colonial government under the command of General Von Trotha and his troops during the 1904-1908 war. Many died in the concentrations camps and by starvation in the Kalahari desert.

Our presence here today is a physical symbol of our longstanding goal to have the German government apologize for the genocide and pay reparations for the atrocities against our people.

We come here as the descendants of the OvaHerero and Nama people in the United States, who have carried the burden of the memories of our ancestors for so many years. We want to impress on you that the emotional impact of the genocide still affects us today; as the memories are forever a part of our psyche.

Our ancestors told us their stories of brutality and oppression under the German colonial regime. The stories of loved ones killed, of concentration camps, of the destruction of their culture and the loss of their properties, land and above all their dignity. Those who experienced the genocide are long gone; but we are their descendants and we still have their powerful stories to tell. We are determined that the world should never forget and will pass the stories from our forefathers and mothers to future generations.



I share with you this beautiful picture of Waterberg Plateau near Okakarara, the site of the last battleground between the Ovaherero and German troops. The land is now mostly farmland belonging to German-Namibian farmers. The site carries a personal story my grandmother, KapeetuaapiNgangane told me in 1997 as I was driving her to Otjiwarongo for a medical check up.

She said, “As teenagers we were never allowed to walk around this area in the evening or without men accompanying us because there was a crazy German man who used to prey on young pregnant Herero women. He would rape them and cut open their stomachs.” I asked her what happened to the German. She said, “Nothing. When we were growing up, the Germans used to do anything to the Herero people without consequences.” I asked: “Even after the war?” She answered, "Yes!"

There was a long silence in the car for the remaining 45-minute trip to Otjiwarongo. I never talked to her about that story again. She is no longer with us today but to this day, that chilling story is within me. It is my family’s story. It is my story.

I also share with you the above picture of my late great-aunt who raised me and often told me stories about the experiences of her parents during the 1904-1908 war. Her own uncle was trampled to death by cattle as the family tried to escape the killing across the Kalahari desert. People went for months in the desert, with only wild berries to eat and to prevent dehydration. This was a better option than being captured by the German troops, and facing systematic starvation in the concentration camps at Okakoverua (Shark Island) and Swakopmund. Today if you visit these two places you will still see the human skulls lying around. They are the remains of people who died brutal deaths and were never accorded dignified burials. These are the stories of the OvaHerero and Nama people, of my people.

Finally, I share the story of my great-aunt Ehrenstine Zauisomue. When I asked her what she wanted for her 80th birthday, she said, “I would like to go visit my birthplace.” She had been born in Okatetee in Omaruru district, but her family like many others, were kicked out to make room for a German farmer.



Together, with my wife we made her wish come true. The picture you see is of our van stuck in the sand at the gate of the farm. We had no way to get out other than to ask the current farm owner to help us. Luckily, he was gracious enough to send a tractor to pull our van out. He asked, “Why are you people here anyway?” We told him this woman was born here and wanted to visit some her relatives’ graves and see her birthplace before she die. The farmer was not amused but he let us in anyway. She looked around the place and identified the sites of where different homesteads used to be and visited the now debilitated graveyards.

This is my story, but unfortunately it is not a unique story. It is a story of every Herero and Nama speaking person. To us, it is not history but a living story. The lingering impacts of the genocide affect our lives still today. My generation is tasked with repairing the damage your colonial government inflicted upon our people. It is a task we do not and will never take lightly.

It is for these reasons that we ask that the German government to apologize for the genocide committed against our people. Reparations are needed in order for our people to:

: rebuild the essential institutions of our culture and our people, institutions destroyed by the war.

: build proper burial places for those remains still lying in the sand of Okakoverua, Swakopmund and those whose bones are lingering in the museums in Germany.

: build peace centers that will teach our children about the danger of wars and teach them the skills to resolve conflict peacefully. Peace centers that can bring about common understanding between different communities in Namibia and the African continent.

: build community schools to provide skills to our children for the betterment of our society.

: repatriate those who are in Botswana, South Africa, the descendants of those displaced or forced out during the German genocide.

: create business centers to teach entrepreneurial skills to our people to benefit our communities.

: heal our psychological wounds and close this painful chapter in our history.

Above all we are asking the German government to engage in meaningful dialogue with the leaders of the affected communities, the Ovaherero and Nama people. We hope that you will take time and read the comments of the petitioners.

*“No Genocide Talk about US without US” ChiefKuaimaRiruako*

Sincerely,

Jephta Uaravaera Nguherimo

On Behalf of the Ovaherero and Nama Descendants in the United States.