



WELCOMING REMARKS

By

His Excellency, Neville Gertze, Ambassador

**Memorial Service on the Occasion of the Repatriation of Human Skulls
of Namibia Origin from the Period of German Colonial Rule to
Namibia**

29 September 2011

St. Matthew Church in Berlin

Dear Dr. Volker Faigle, Plenipotentiary of the Council for the Federal Republic of Germany & the European Union for the Evangelical Church in Germany,

Dear Dr. Jochen Motte, Member of the Board of the United Evangelical Mission,

Dear Honourable Kazenambo Kazenambo, Minister for Youth, National Service Sports and Culture,

Dear Bishop Kameeta,

Representatives of the German Government and Parliament,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Representatives of NGOs,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Today, we have gathered here to remember the lives of our forefathers and -mothers that were lost in the struggle for self-determination and independence during Germany's colonial rule over Namibia and its people.

I am very moved to witness this historic moment where you, my dear compatriots of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and Nama communities, who journeyed all the way from Namibia to Berlin – once the capital of the infamous Berlin conference and now the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany - have assembled in this church, St. Matthäus, together with such a (big) crowd of German citizens paying homage to our ancestors, who paid the ultimate price during German colonial rule.

I would like to recognize the attendance of everyone who is here today and pay tribute to all who made it possible for us to receive and honour our ancestors in this dignified manner through this memorial service.

I acknowledge our friends and partners who have stood by the Namibian people during the long struggle for independence and continue to stand with us, as can be seen today. These friends and partners are numerous and have diverse backgrounds- some are private individuals, some members of churches and religious groups, some are committed members of NGOs; some are parliamentarians or members of political institutions and some are academics and teachers.

I would also like to recognize the work of Markus Frenzel, a German television reporter with the broadcaster MDR. It was his documentary film that in 2008 proved the existence of human remains of Namibian origin in Germany.

Finally, I would like to thank Bishop Kameeta for presiding over the service this afternoon. Your Grace, may your wisdom, compassion, strength and humanity guide us on this important occasion.

Dear Friends, today our hearts ache. But as we bow our heads in dismay, as we weep and condemn the evil, brutality and savagery that mankind has proven to be capable of, we are also grateful for the advocates of humanity, decency, morality and justice who supported the Namibian people and joined their efforts to restore the honour and dignity of our ancestors, these heroes and heroines, these fathers and mothers, these brothers and sisters, these sons and daughters of the soil. Their memory and sacrifice nurture and sustain our freedom and strengthen our resolve to defend and treasure peace and justice.

Here before us lies a stark reminder of not only the Namibian victims of the violence of the German colonial era but also of the millions of other innocent victims of the evil in the world that sadly we have come to see time and time again.

Here before us lies the lesson that never again should such evil triumph over human decency and goodness. Let this occasion serve to direct our conscience to fight racism, injustice and oppression together.

Here before us lies the evidence of human suffering that calls upon all of us to build families, neighborhoods, communities, societies, nations, and a world that values tolerance, compassion, peace, justice and celebrates our common humanity so that future generations can flourish.

Let us - Namibians and Germans - join hands, to fight for the noble goal of one day living in a world devoid of racism – that disgusting scourge of humanity.

Let us join hands to fight for a world worth living in for our children and grand-children.

Let us join hands to build a world of peace, where it is more important to find a tree under which to assemble and talk – as our Chiefs so wisely appealed to last night – instead of cutting them down and building warships, with which we fight each other.

Let us come together and talk about „the indescribable and the undiscussable to reconstruct human discourse after trauma“, as the late Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On once said.

I thank you.