

**STATEMENT BY
HON.DR. KUAIMA RIRUAKO
PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF THE OVAHERERO**



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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE HANDOVER BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, OF THE SKULLS OF THE OVAHERERO AND NAMA
VICTIMS OF THE 1904-8 WARS OF RESISTANCE, FOR REPATRIATION TO THE
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA.**

**BERLIN, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
30 SEPTEMBER, 2011**

- **DIRECTOR OF CEREMONIES -**
- **Hon. Ministers and MP's of both the Parliaments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Namibia;**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps present;**
- **Distinguished Fellow Traditional Leaders from Namibia;**
- **Members of the International Community;**
- **Members of the Media from different countries of the world, present;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

And Last but not least, fellow Namibians resident in Germany and elsewhere.

I salute and welcome you all for having found time to come here to witness this historic occasion.

I am deeply moved by your presence.

Let me first and foremost, and sincerely, express on behalf of the OvaHerero in Namibia, and in the Diaspora, our appreciation and gratitude to our Namibian Government for forwarding to the Government of the Federal Republic of ~~Namibia~~ ^{Germany} our request to have these skulls repatriated. Fellow traditional leader, Chief Dawid Frederick of the Nama Traditional Authority Association, and myself representing the OvaHerero, requested the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Namibia, Mr. Nahas Angula, our letter of 16th September 2008, to forward our request to the German Government.

Let me also, in the same breath, thank the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for having agreed to have these

skulls repatriated to their motherland. I hope that by doing this, both governments have set in motion a process to be followed by many other things, so that this repatriation is not an end in itself.

The repatriation of the skulls could not have come at a better time than now, especially when we as people are free and independent from foreign rule and occupation, first by Imperial Germany, and again by racist Apartheid South Africa.

Let me also thank the organisers of this event for the warm welcome we have received upon our arrival.

Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, having said that, allow me to address some of the issues that are directly related to why we are here on this occasion and to do so, I would like to invite Ms. Ufjua Muinjangue, the Chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee, to come to the podium and read the rest of my statement, which I do not only want the German establishment and people to hear but the whole world as well. Ms. Muinjangue!

We are here not just to receive the skulls of our people, which have been lying here in various institutions in this country for well over one hundred years, but also to rewrite the history of a sad event that happened to my people and the Nama people in particular, who were specifically singled out by Orders of Extermination by a hired retired German soldier by the name of General Lothar von Trotha.

Let me state it categorically clear to all and sundry that we are not here just to receive these skulls, to look at them, say "thank you" and then go back to Namibia. This is not all there is to it!

This is a highly emotive issue and should not be treated lightly on a touch-and-go basis but with utmost perspicacity.

I wish the whole world to hear and know that these skulls are the tangible material evidence of what had happened to our people. They represent acts of war atrocities and genocide committed against our people during their just wars of resistance that started with the Battle of Otjunda. This battle ended in the public execution by a firing squad of the Ovambanderu King, Kahimemua Nguvauva, and his friend Nikodemus Kambahahiza Kavikunua on the 12th of June, 1896, in Okahandja.

There was also the Bondelswarts Nama repression in 1903 in which their leader, Chief Christian, was shot dead. Then there was also the Ovaherero and other Nama wars of 1904-1908 under Chiefs Samuel Maharero of the Ovaherero, and Kaptein Hendrick Witbooi of the Nama. Thus these skulls are testimony to the blood we shed and other sufferings we endured during these wars of resistance for the love of our mother and father land.

I know that the German government and its representatives in Namibia do not even want to hear mention of the words "genocide" or "war atrocities" but how else can we explain the fact that our people, during their just wars of resistance to German Colonialism, were killed in Germany's name by the German "Schutztruppe" under Curt von Francois, Leutwein, Lothar von Trotha and others? How else can we explain that their bodies were decapitated to provide these skulls for so called "scientific" (or rather pseudo-scientific) studies? Could this have happened without war atrocities or without an act of genocide? Why is it wrong for the Ovaherero and Nama to use

these words when the same words are being used by a German Government representative?

In this regard, let me refer you to the speech made on the Namibian soil by the then German Minister of Economic Co-Operation and Development, Ms Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, and broadcast live to German viewers. On the 14th of August 2004 in Okakarara in Namibia, the then Minister said the following, and I quote: "When the Herero... resisted, General von Trotha's troops embarked on a war of extermination against them".

Further she stated, and I quote her again: "The atrocities committed at that time would today be termed genocide – and nowadays a General von Trotha would be prosecuted and convicted." Although she was saying these words whilst she was addressing a pre-dominantly Ovaherero audience, I hold the view that the atrocities committed at that time, and by virtue of their the Extermination Order of 22 April, 1905, also applied to the Nama people because it does not differ in intent from the one of the Ovaherero of the 2nd of October, 1904.

I wish to draw the attention of the German Government to the fact that Mrs Wiczorek-Zeul was speaking in her capacity as a representative of the Federal Government of the Republic of Germany. To illustrate this, again I quote from her watershed speech in Namibia: She said that she speaking "...as the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and as a representative of the German Government and the German Parliament," end of quote. She said that in her opening remark of her statement, which incidentally, I happen to have.

I take that to be true, authoritative and binding on the conscience of the German Government and the German parliament. Your representative has spoken in your name, and you cannot run away from that. The Extermination Orders issued by General von Trotha were the official decrees in terms of which the Ovaherero and Nama were to be "exterminated" or "annihilated". They were accepted, endorsed, authorised and budgeted for by the German Parliament and Government. All that constituted the German Government's expressed official intent, and Von Trotha brutally and ruthlessly carried out this mandate after which he was happily decorated with the highest German Imperial medal of honour, the "Pour le Merite", and then congratulated by Kaiser Wilhelm II himself in these words:-

"I hereby readily state that you fully justified my confidence in your insight and warfare which prompted me to appoint you Commander of the Schutztruppe for South West Africa in difficult times. I wish to confirm my Imperial gratitude and my warm appreciation for your outstanding achievements by awarding you the Order pour le Merite."

The decoration of the highest medal of honour and the appreciative words of the Kaiser must be understood against the background of the atrocities of General von Trotha against our ancestors. To summarise these atrocities, I would say that our people were:

- Brutally murdered;
- Exterminated;
- Annihilated;
- Imprisoned in concentration camps;
- Used as slave labourers;

- Tortured;
- Women and young girls raped and used as sex slaves for German soldiers and left with German off-springs fathered by these German soldiers;
- Their properties destroyed and confiscated without any compensation whatsoever;
- Their ancestral lands were confiscated without any compensation;
- Subjected to other inhumane acts; e.g. experiments by Dr Eugene Fischer and others;
- Deported and/or forced to flee to other countries (Cameroon, Togo, Botswana, South Africa, Angola, etc);
- Decapitated to produce the skulls you are looking at today;
- Subjected to all kinds of conditions of hardships, e.g. poisoning of waterholes, public hangings, driven into the Kalahari Desert where many died of hunger and thirst.

It was these atrocities that the German Kaiser praised as 'outstanding achievements', which to us meant genocide. In this regard how can we just come here and simply collect these skulls and go home without saying anything else? We say that all these acts constituted, in terms of international law, a crime of genocide, for which we demand a just reparation.

Since genocide was already admitted by the German Minister, and also in view of the fact that the Namibian National Assembly has unanimously adopted my motion on the issue of genocide and reparation, I hold the view that the next logical step that should be taken is to organise an urgent dialogue comprising of the affected groups, and the representatives of the governments of the Republic of Namibia and the Federal Republic of Germany to address the legacies of Genocide.

Director of Ceremonies-

Let me comment briefly on some of the unfortunate statements made by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of this country and some of its senior officials on the issue of Genocide and atrocities.

The Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs is on record "that if the repatriation of the skulls was seen by the Namibian side in the context of commemorating a shared past, the Ministry would be willing to fund 2-3 delegates as well as the repatriation process itself. However, should this repatriation be seen in the context of "atrocities", the Ministry would find it difficult to fund the process."

I have already referred to the speech of Mrs Wiecezorek-Zeul who used words like 'atrocities', 'genocide' and 'extermination' and who said in broad daylight that she was speaking in her capacity as a German Minister and as a representative of the German Government and German Parliament. Why should we be punished for using these words? Is what our people went through and lost worth only 2-3 tickets? This was an unnecessary blackmail, and even worse to be said on the eve of our departure to this country.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me continue!

The dialogue – and, incidentally, from today onward, I shall be using the word trialogue – that I would like to propose is nothing new and I would not be reinventing the wheel for it had been done before by none other than the first German Chancellor, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, after the Second World War, when on September 27, 1951, he said: (And I quote)

"In our name, unspeakable crimes have been committed and demand compensation and restitution, both moral and material for the persons and properties of Jews who have been so seriously harmed." Let me repeat that!

I say the same and demand the same that in the German name, unspeakable crimes had been committed, and we also demand compensation and restitution both moral and material, for the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama victims who have been seriously harmed by orders of extermination.

Let me also, at this point in time, digress a little bit and inform you that (in June 1904) a preliminary compensation commission, consisting of Attorney Erdmann, O. Erhard, M. Kirsten, Carl Schlettwein and Albert Voigts travelled to Berlin to obtain compensation for damages suffered by German farmers during the war. The Reichstag approved firstly (June 1904) "2 million Deutsche Mark and later another 5 million Deutsche Mark."

If German settlers, who may have acquired their farms from the land previously owned by the Ovaherero and Nama, and for which they paid no compensation, can come here and demand compensation, why should we not be treated the same way?

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been hearing quite often from high-ranking German officials that the time to apologise for the crimes to which they have already admitted, call them genocide, if you will, has lapsed and International Law and/or specific Conventions cannot be applied retrospectively for crimes committed from 1904 - 1908. While I do not agree with all these shortsighted conveniences, let me say that I may not choose to go that route for now because the Dr. Konrad Adenauer's approach and/or precedent should suffice for our case.

When the Federal Government of Germany paid compensation in various forms to the State of Israel, and the Jewish victims all over the world, it did not do so in terms of any international laws or conventions but in terms of the Luxembourg Agreement and its own subsequent Bundestag laws for specific purposes.

Although I find it difficult to pronounce the German acronym "Bundesentschädigungsgesetz" the English formal name of that law is 'Federal Law for the Compensation of the Victims of National Socialist Persecution'. It was enacted to give effect to the various forms of compensations to the State of Israel and the Jews throughout the world.

The German Government relied only on its own moral conscience to do the right thing for the humanity of the Jews, and the State of Israel, and in so doing passed that legislation to pay compensation.

The State of Israel was paid in goods and services while Jewish organisations, and even other countries, were paid and are being paid in cash to the tune of billions.

Are we the Ovaherero and the Nama, different (as human beings) and therefore undeserving of the same treatment? Or is it because we are not white and therefore don't deserve compensation? These are not just rhetorical questions but questions that are begging for honest and sincere answers.

Director of ceremonies

Ladies and gentlemen

Since I am not sure I shall have another opportunity to raise other issues, let me raise a few concerns or questions right now:

1. The studies that were conducted in Germany were done at different institutions and by different scientists, medical doctors, students of medicine, professors, etc. What conclusions or findings did they come to? And where are the reports of these studies?
2. For instance, Professor Felix von Luschan, a racial anthropologist and deputy director of the Berlin Museum of Ethnology, did some studies and corresponded with Lieutenant Ralph Zurn in Okahandja who donated to him more skulls ("specimens"). Will the Berlin Museum of Ethnology have an answer for these studies?

Dr. Bofinger, the concentration camp doctor at Shark Island near Lüderitz, decapitated in 1906 the bodies of seventeen (17) Nama prisoners, including that of a one-year old Nama girl. After breaking open the skulls he removed and weighed the brains before placing each head in preserving alcohol....for export to the Institute of Pathology at the University of Berlin (p.225 Kaiser's Holocaust). Can we be privileged with the findings of those studies?

The studies of Dr. Eugene Fischer on the skulls of the Ovaherero and on the Baster people of Rehoboth, which included the photographing of their naked bodies, must also be revealed to us. It cannot be about us and yet without us when it comes to the ownership of these things.

Director of ceremonies

I demand that all the documentations, and other human remains, even in private homes, be presented to our government to be kept in our own museums and archives. Otherwise, for me to have come here and to say that we are here to rewrite our history, and not be privileged with these things for our libraries, museums and archives, it would make no sense and will be a travesty of historical justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen

My last remark goes to the assertion that we.....the Ovaherero under our leader, Chief Samuel Maharero.....started the war and visited the consequences thereof upon ourselves and therefore we should not blame the German government for that.

I reject this categorically as a historical nonsense. The Ovaherero and the Nama did not start the war, but responded to an imposed war. The war, to all intents and purposes, was not only started and declared against our country and people but against the African Continent as a whole when the European Powers organised the so-called "Berlin Conference of 1884-1885". I prefer to call it the Berlin Criminal Conference of 1884-1885 because they came together to unleash a criminal war against Africa and its peoples. There is therefore nothing glorious about it.

This conference met from November 1884 and again in February 1885 and resulted in the following agreement....."The General Berlin Act of February 26, 1885."

The Berlin Act, in short and with relevance to my statement as contained in its Article 6, imposed an obligation on the German Government; its purported intent was -

(And I quote from Article 6)

".....to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being....and bringing home to them the blessings of civilisation."

The "protective treaties" and the preservation of the native tribes, the improvement of their material conditions and bringing home to them the blessings of civilisation, mentioned in the Act, did not happen to our ancestors.

Instead, they were issued with Extermination Orders and were forced to flee to other countries and conditions of hardships were the order of their daily lives.

The contemptuous behaviour and abuse of the Ovaherero by Lieutenant Ralph Zurn (the Military Commander in Okahandja), the undisciplined behaviour of the Schutztruppe, the raping of the young Ovaherero girls and women, regardless of whether or not they were married,' the acquisition of Herero lands and livestock through fraud or by force, all these combined to infuriate the Ovaherero.

But, as if these things were not enough,Lieutenant Zurn ordered the exhumation of Ovaherero bodies, which he

decapitated and sent their heads to Germany for income, (Kaiser's Holocaust, pp. 127-128).

Ladies and Gentlemen

All these atrocities, de-humanisation, fraudulent and forceful confiscation of the Ovaherero and Nama lands and livestock were not done out of context. They were done in conformity with the Department of Colonial Policy developed by the Commissioner of resettlement, Dr. Paul Rohrbach who wrote as follows in 1903: And I quote

"The decision to colonise in South West Africa could after all mean nothing else but this, that the native tribes would have to give up their lands on which they had previously grazed their stock in order that the white man might have the land for the grazing of his stock." (Annotated Reprint of the 19918 Blue Book, p.34)

To acquire this, the Imperial Commissioner for South West Africa, Curt von Francois, used (own words) "force against the natives". The Kaizer's Holocaust, p.57).

The massacre of the Witbooi Nama at HoornKranz was a case in point. They were brutally murdered for refusing to sign a so-called "protection treaty."

In the Ovaherero culture, nothing can be so odious and unforgiveable then digging out the remains of their deceased, let alone chopping off the heads while they are looking on.These are the things that gave rise to the war. The Ovaherero had no other choice but to resort to an armed struggle to defend themselves, their land and livestock. They

decided to fight war with war, so to speak. They did not start the war.

The fact that the Ovaherero and the Nama took to an armed struggle was the inevitable outcome of the atrocities they were subjected to; they were pushed to a position of extreme provocation and were left without any other choice but to resort to a defensive war against an offensive one carried out by foreigners against them. We did therefore not start the war. On the contrary, German colonialism started the war, full stop!

My ancestors did not come to Germany to kill the Germans; only the opposite happened.

Had they not come to my country, we would not have come here to collect these skulls.

Ours was just a war of self defence, and it is no wonder that the leader of the Social Democrats, August Bebel, according Mrs. Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul said that her leader: *(And I quote)*

".....honoured their uprising as a just struggle for liberation."

What she said about her leader is true but not enough. From other sources, we learned that in late 1906 he and his party were convinced that what Germany did on Shark Island

(and I quote again): "... was not the cultural mission of colonialism but a war of extermination".

(The Kaiser's Holocaust, pp222 – 223)

What could be more of an admission of genocide than this, coming for that matter from the leader of a German Parliamentary Party in 1906? And more so, can a 'war of

extermination' escape the inevitable outcome of a genocide? And, would the Social Democrats of today (2011) agree with their leader of 1906 that the German Government of 1906 waged a war of extermination against the Ovaherero and Nama on Shark Island?

In conclusion.....Ladies and Gentlemen.....let me say that with these skulls as tangible material evidence of the genocide committed to our ancestors between 1904-1908, I propose today, here and now, that a tripartite ad hoc committee be set up, consisting of the descendants of the victims of the Extermination Orders, on the one hand, and the representatives of the two governments of Germany and Namibia to arrange for a trialogue agenda to work out the modalities for the reparation for the admitted genocide. My proposal is an attempt at trying to do things the peaceful way.

This can be fashioned along the lines of the Luxembourg Agreement amongst Germany, the state of Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference on September 10, 1952.

This to me is an excellent precedent that ought to be followed because genocide for the Jews and genocide for the Ovaherero and Nama cannot be separated. And since Germany has already accepted the United Nations Definition of Genocide of 1949, it saves us the trouble of having to define what is or is not genocide.

I am inclined to sound a word of caution that my people's patience can run out and they are also, as I am talking to you, watching on television the developments in the Arabs world and cannot remain uninfluenced forever when they see how others are solving their problems. The peace and tranquillity

that obtain in Namibia today, I'm afraid, may not remain forever.

All these empty clichés like "Special Initiative", "Special moral and historical responsibility", "reconciliation", etc., voiced by the German Government and readily accepted by the Namibian Government have now outlived their usefulness and will never ever be substitutes for the reparation. They are now only good for the archive, as it were.

The Namibian Government must make a categorical stand and tell the whole world whether it stands together with the German subterfuges or by the side of the Ovaherero and Nama people on their demand for reparation, just as the State of Israel stood firmly behind the cause of the Jewish people. Otherwise, I shall before long regard it as conniving with the German Government, which is bent on denying Namibian citizens what is due to them – namely compensation.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

That is the message that I had wished to convey to you in my capacity as the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero on behalf of the Ovaherero in Namibia and in the Diaspora.

I THANK YOU!