



Statement

by

**Chief Alfons Kaihepovazandu Maharero, Chairman of
the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for Dialogue on
the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904), on the Occasion of the
Official Handing-over Ceremony of the Namibia
Skeletal Remains that were Expatriated to Germany
following/during the 1904 Genocide in Namibia**

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September 30, 2011

Director of Proceedings;

Distinguished representative of the Host Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;

Hon. Kazenambo Kazenambo, Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, and Leader of the Namibian Delegation to witness this solemn occasion for the official handing – over of the Namibia Skeletal Remains that were expatriated to Germany following/during the 1904 Genocide in Namibia;

The Right Reverend Zephania Kameeta – Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the Republic of Namibia;

Fellow Chiefs and other Traditional Leaders from the Republic of Namibia;

Distinguished Guest and Esteemed Dignitaries;

Representatives of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen

As introduced on the Programme of proceedings my name is Alfons Kaihepovazandu Maharero – a direct descendent of Samuel Maharero the erstwhile Commander in Chief of the Ovaherero anti-colonial resistance in the year 1904. I am presently the sitting Chief on the throne of dynasty of the Otjikatjamuaha Royal House, as well as the Chairman of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904).

Director of Proceedings, as we are assembled here today to witness the historical return of the Skeletal Remains of our ancestors that were illicitly smuggled from Namibia to Germany, some 107 years ago, allow me to use this opportunity to perform the following two basic functions. Firstly to sketch a historical context to this ceremony which marks the handing-over of some of skeletal remains. Secondly given the shared history between Namibia and Germany, I will outline the vision of OCD-1904 on the finding of an amicable and lasting solution to the illusive attempts at forging a new chapter of friendship based on the principle of reconciliation, responsibility and justice.

A Historical Overview:

The culmination of the period of German colonial rule over Namibia has been the horrific catastrophe that befell the various indigenous African communities of central and southern Namibia. To cite specific examples are those of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and Nama communities, whose initiatives to resisting colonial domination were brutally suppressed, as well as the Damara and San communities.

Speaking for the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu people the hostilities started with the German encroachment on their land, starting with the battles of Otjunda in 1896, which led to the execution by firing squad of Nicodemus Kavikunua and Kahimemua Nguvauva, by the forces of General Leutwein. As the intensity of land losses and other atrocities committed by German troops and traders intensified the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu people were left with no options rather than to fight for their freedom. This is clearly evident from the following excerpt from a letter by Samuel Maharero to leaders of other communities in the territory *"All our obedience and patience with the Germans is of little avail, for each day they shoot someone dead for no reason at all. Hence I appeal to you, my Brother, not to hold aloof from the uprising, but to make your voice heard so that all Africa may take up arms against the Germans. Let us die fighting rather than die as a result of maltreatment, imprisonment or some other form of calamity."*

Many Ovaherero and Ovambanderu lives were lost in battles. On Sunday, 2 October 1904, after the holding of field service, General Lothar von Trotha, the Commander in Chief of the German army (the Schuttstruppe), issued the most notorious proclamation in which he called for the total annihilation of the Ovaherero people. As a result many of our ancestors succumbed to shooting, hanging, thirst, poisoned water sources etc. Subsequent to the war in 1904, German colonial Government pursued harsh policies which saw the establishment of concentration camps in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Shark Island etc., in which many of our ancestors were forced to live under inhospitable conditions of overcrowding, exposure to extreme cold weather without proper shelter and clothing, lack of basic foodstuffs, slavery and hard labour and the sexual exploitation of women. These resulted in further losses of lives, and in the most gruesome manner the corpses of those who perished, were decapitated, boiled in pots, flesh and hair scrapped with pieces of broken glass by the women prisoners of war, and packed in boxes for shipment to Germany, apparently for purposes of scientific research. About 80 000 of our ancestors died at the hands of the German Schuttstruppe, where by a total of at least 300 Ovaherero/Ovambanderu skulls alone, not to mention that of Namas, Damaras and Sans, ended up in German museums.

Parallel to these acts of physical violence, additional suffering was also brought to bear on our ancestors through the theft and destruction of their moveable and immoveable properties, through various acts that were sanctioned by the German state of that era. During the same period, vast tracks of land and large herds of cattle were expropriated. To add hurt to injury, the colonial regime ruthlessly extracted labourers from the prisoners of war of resistance to serve German settlers and soldiers. Successive generations of the local indigenous people

continue to languish to this very day under the legacies triggered through these acts of economic genocide.

The hardships of the war as well as the hardships of the post-war colonial policies also have led to the permanent separation of Ovaherero and Ovambanderu kinsmen and women from one another, as many of our ancestors, were forced to flee from the lands of their birth, ending up depending on the goodwill of various neighbouring communities in Northern Namibia, as well as beyond the borders of Namibia in Botswana, South Africa and Angola, where they were assimilated in the cultures and languages of their various hosts.

OCD-1904 Vision of How the Present German Government could fulfill its Historic

Responsibility:

There are those who may be tempted to embrace an illusionary view that many years have passed since this dark period of senseless yet massive destruction, displacement, suffering and killing, and that the situation may have resolved itself over the years. Or that Namibia is now an independent and sovereign state and is enjoying a good working relationship with its German counterpart. However, for the greater majority if not all the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu people, remains of the view that unconditional admission of responsibility, official apology and restorative justice are the pillars of genuine reconciliation and peace between our two people.

The OCD-1904 is in this regard a culmination of the All Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Conference convened in Opuwo in May 2005 to deliberate on the unresolved issues of cooperation with the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany around the 1904 Genocide.

Since its inception the OCD-1904 has continued to advocate for direct dialogue between German Government on the one hand and those communities that directly bore the brunt of its predecessor Government, through the mediation of the Namibian Government. On various occasion the OCD - 1904 has communicated this message to successive German emissaries in the form of Ambassadors stationed in Namibia, visiting German political office – bearers and officials.

Namibia has been independent for 21 years now, and we have continued to witness a degree of intransigence on the part of the German Government.

Therefore, we recognize and appreciate the existing bilateral development cooperation between the Governments of the Republic of Namibia and the Federal Republic of Germany. However, we are equally alarmed by and regret the fact that the latter Government has opted to hide behind the excuse of blanket development. In this regard, the OCD-1904 would state here loud and clear, that development assistance to Namibia as a matter of bilateral agreements between the two governments, must not have umbilical link to the restorative

justice we are demanding. Meaning, that the German Government must direct the restorative justice directly to the affected communities through their government and not in a form of development assistance to Namibian Government.

Similarly, we have taken note of the Bundestag resolution of June 16, 2004, as having signified a first step in the long overdue process for the reconciliation of our two people, however to our disappointment it fell far short of meeting our expectations. Especially by failing to acknowledge these past despicable acts, as **acts of Genocide**; as well as for its failure to render an **unconditional Apology** based on the admission of moral guilt.

Furthermore we also acknowledge, the apology by Hon. Heidi Marie Wieczorek Zeul, the former Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development in the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, offered on the August 11, 2004, on the Occasion of the pilgrimage to Okakarara for the Centennial Commemoration of the decisive battle of Ohamakari between German soldiers and the resistance movement of our ancestors. Again, although our state of sorrow was partly lifted by this bold step of courage and statesmanship, we however learned that upon her return to Germany, Ms. Wieczorek Zeul was rebuked in Parliament for having taken such a reconciliatory gesture.

Therefore, as we stand here today there has not been a **formal apology** from the German Government. Such shortcomings may seem small but they have had a significant impact in retarding the commencement and progress of a genuine process of reconciliation, which we eagerly want to see.

In the specific context of the skeletal remains whose official handing-over we are bound to witness today, were taken under the pre-text of scientific research, and attracted the interest of among others, geneticist Eugene Fischer, anthropologist Wilhelm Waldeyer, ethnologist Felix von Luschan etc. However it forms part of the sad history of humiliation and denigration of the African people in general and more specifically our ancestors who directly bore the brunt in this regard. Central to the healing of our wounds is a process of full disclosure in terms of the thrust these pseudo-scientific inquiries and the findings thereof.

Lastly allow me to briefly reflect the OCD-1904's position on the grand idea of the German Government's "**special reconciliation initiative**". We remain of the opinion that any process of true reconciliation cannot be pursued through **unilateralism**, but would require an unconditional process based on a structured **Dialogue** between those on both sides of the conflict divide.

OCD-1904 Vision of People to People Solidarity and Friendship

The intransigence of the German Government have to change, however it remains our considered opinion that this may not happen without a critical consciousness on the part of the German citizenry.

Some 103 years after the carnage that Germany left behind in Namibia, in October 2007, the OCD–1904 welcomed and engaged in constructive dialogue with the descendants of General Von Trotha, during their mission to offer the Ovaherero and other people of Namibia, their apologies for the role of their forefather in the Genocide committed against their people more than hundred years ago.

We remain fully cognizant of the fact that the descendants of General Von Trotha as well as those of other functionaries in the German colonial military and administrative machinery cannot in any way be legally liable for the atrocities committed by their forefathers. However such demonstration of moral sympathies and political solidarity with us as victims of the injustices committed by their forefathers can become important milestone in the rekindling of people to people solidarity and friendship. Hence our message to them was as follow - *“we acknowledge and are humbled by your courage and in the same vein we challenge you to demonstrate the same degree of courage by actively engaging your Government and fellow citizens back home with the view of positively changing impressions and fears in addressing the issues relating to the 1904 Genocide.in the spirit of our shared history”*.

This remain our message to the German civil society and citizenry in general, more specifically the descendants of other German colonial personalities (Goring, Leutwein, von Francios, Franke, von Estorff, von Lindequist, Streitwolf, Von Zulow, Zurn, von Durling etc.) you have to develop a critical consciousness of this shared history, you have to reach out to us with the view of positively shaping a peaceful common future for all our children, including those not yet born.

Allow me in conclusion to reiterate the OCD–1904’s commitment to work with and through the Government of the Republic of Namibia, in our quest for savaging hope and consolation for the victims of the enduring legacies from our colonial past. To us the ultimate aim of any process of genuine reconciliation is the attainment of restorative justice.

Finally, we would like to express our dismay and disappointment for the inhospitable treatment accorded to our delegation since our arrival given the shared historical ties. Our disappointment is attributed to following:

1. the mysterious absence of the German Government officials from attending the memorial service in honour of the victims of the German colonial war of extermination;
2. the refusal to participate in the panel discussion at the *House of Culture* organized by the NGOs;
3. and more importantly, the last minute withdrawal of the German Government to sign off the repatriation of the skulls;
4. the strategy of the German Government to give a low profile to this important historical development for both countries.

All these practices by the German Government will not deter us from our course to demand a Structured and Constructive Dialogue, aimed at achieving **Restorative Justice** for the victims of the German colonial war.

Directors of Proceedings, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for granting me your audience.