

Motion

submitted by Members of the Bundestag Niema Movassat, Wolfgang Gehrcke, Jan van Aken, Christine Buchholz, Sevim Dağdelen, Dr. Diether Dehm, Annette Groth, Heike Hänsel, Inge Höger, Andrej Hunko, Ulla Jelpke, Katrin Kunert, Stefan Liebich, Dr. Alexander S. Neu, Alexander Ulrich, Dr. Sahra Wagenknecht and The LEFT PARTY parliamentary group

Reconciliation with Namibia – remembrance and apology for the genocide in the former colony of German South-West Africa

The German Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

- I. The German Bundestag notes:
 1. The German Bundestag remembers the atrocities perpetrated by the colonial troops of the German Empire in the former colony of German South-West Africa, and commemorates the victims of massacres, expulsions, expropriation, forced labour, rape, medical experiments, deportations and inhuman confinement in concentration camps. The war of extermination waged by German colonial troops in the years 1904 to 1908 resulted in the death of up to 80 percent of the Herero people, more than half of the Nama people, and a large part of the Damara and San ethnic groups.
 2. The German Bundestag acknowledges the heavy burden of guilt that the German colonial troops incurred by carrying out these crimes against the Herero, Nama, Damara and San peoples. These war crimes, expulsions and massacres committed by the German Empire were genocide. The orders issued by Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha on 2 October 1904 against the Herero and on 22 April 1905 against the Nama, along with the actual warfare that ensued, are clear evidence of the exterminatory intent towards these ethnic groups, which later also claimed the lives of Damara and San people. This warfare involved internment in concentration camps, forced labour under inhumane conditions and medical experiments.
 3. The German Bundestag apologises to the descendants of the victims of this genocide for the suffering inflicted upon their ancestors. It reiterates the special historic and moral responsibility and obligation that Germany has towards the Republic of Namibia and the Namibian population. The German Bundestag previously declared this responsibility in its resolutions of April 1989 and June 2004.
 4. On 26 October 2006, the Namibian National Assembly already reached a unanimous decision to define the war of extermination carried out by German troops as genocide. The Bundestag supports the demand, contained

in that decision, for a comprehensive, targeted and structured dialogue without preconditions – i.e. without eliminating the issue of restorative justice as an important part of the reconciliation process. The increased bilateral development cooperation with Namibia is important, but it is an entirely different matter to restorative justice and cannot replace it.

5. Being fully aware of these crimes of genocide and of the millions of victims of colonialism, the German Bundestag expresses its profound shame, regret and sadness. At the same time, it recognises and pays tribute to the subjected people's long, active and courageous resistance to all manifestations of colonial rule.
 6. The German Bundestag is aware that the consequences of the genocide and German colonialism in former German South-West Africa are still evident in the social and economic reality of present-day Namibia. The expulsion of the native population and the appropriation of land and livestock in violation of traditional land rights resulted in an unjust system of land distribution that still exists today. The Herero and Nama in particular lack the means to purchase land or to compensate in other ways for the losses they suffered in the past and to re-establish a new basis for their economic independence. Reconciliation initiatives should start here and pursue the aim of balancing out these structural disadvantages that began in colonial times and still exist today.
 7. The German Bundestag is aware that addressing the genocide and its consequences is of immediate relevance to the present. That is why Germany must face up to its colonial past. Self-critical reflection on the colonial influences in German society is also a requirement for addressing racism, particularly racism targeted at black people.
- II. The German Bundestag will establish a German-Namibian Parliamentary Friendship Group to raise the dialogue between the two parliaments to a formal, structured and targeted level.
- III. The German Bundestag calls upon the Federal Government:
1. to fully assume the political and moral responsibilities and obligations that arise as a result of German culpability for the genocide;
 2. to apologise to the Republic of Namibia and especially the Herero, Nama, Damara and San ethnic groups for this genocide;
 3. to continue the dialogue that began in June 2014 between the German and Namibian governments in an open and unreserved manner with the goal of achieving reconciliation; to intensify the dialogue and make it more comprehensive and more structured; and to involve representatives of the descendants of the groups primarily targeted in the genocide (trialogue). Within this structured debate, all sides must be able to talk about the issues that are important to them and to express their ideas, such as the question of restorative justice;
 4. as part of this dialogue process with the Namibian government and the representatives of the descendants of the groups most affected by the genocide, to offer the Namibian side the installation of a structural compensation fund in Namibia that incorporates the Namibian National Assembly, the government and the affected population groups:
 - in order to balance out the structural disadvantages – particularly with regard to the land issue and the lack of infrastructure – and the resulting social imbalances that began in the German colonial era and are still apparent today;

- and to ensure that businesses and their legal successors that profited from forced labour, expropriation and expulsions in the former colony of German South-West Africa make an appropriate financial contribution to the structural compensation fund or participate in other reparation measures negotiated in dialogue;
5. to critically examine the measures and results of the “special initiative” introduced by the then German Federal Government in 2005 in cooperation with the Namibians (National Assembly, government, and representatives of the descendants of the victims of German colonial crimes) and to jointly draw the appropriate conclusions for safeguarding ownership, influence and decision-making authority of the affected population in the process of devising future reconciliation measures, while jointly setting the subsequent goals and actions, and determining the resources as well as institutions and steering committees that should implement these measures in the future;
 6. to work towards achieving the following goals as part of the reconciliation initiatives:
 - Special promotion and intensification of school and cultural exchanges between Germany and Namibia;
 - Decolonisation of the culture of remembrance in schools and society in both countries, and the promotion of educational projects that take a critical stance towards colonialism and racism;
 - Support for initiatives that campaign against the continued glorification of colonial-era criminals through memorials and street names, and instead seek the commendation of those people who engaged in anti-colonial resistance;
 7. to compile a complete inventory, including certification of origin, of the human remains that are stored in German archives and holdings and that were stolen from former German colonies, other colonies, and overseas territories, and
 - to offer to return these to the countries of origin and population groups concerned;
 - to create and ensure a suitably dignified framework for the repatriation of human remains to the countries of origin under the lead of for the German Federal Government, and to organise and implement the repatriation process in collaboration with the countries and groups of people concerned;
 8. to ensure that the cultural goods that were stolen from former German colonies during the colonial era, and that are still stored in German archives and collections today, are identified and that an offer is made to repatriate them;
 9. to support attempts to address colonialism, and Germany’s colonial past in particular – also by means of appropriate financial contributions from organisations and businesses and their legal successors that profited from the forced labour, expropriation and expulsions in the former German colonies. Such support would include:
 - erecting a monument in a central position in Berlin to the African victims of slavery, colonialism and racial violence;
 - founding a federal foundation whose purpose is to strengthen Germans’ sense of responsibility for colonialism and racism, and to enlarge their knowledge about the history and cultural diversity of the various countries and peoples who were enslaved by the colonial system, as well as about their resistance and struggle for liberty;

- installing an appropriate and critical depiction of Germany's colonial past in the Humboldt-Forum currently being erected in the centre of Berlin, in consultation with experts from the countries concerned;
10. to fulfil the desire expressed by the Namibian side in 2012 for the establishment of a German-Namibian textbook commission modelled on the German-Polish textbook commission and to produce school books on this shared history written by historians from both countries;
 11. To urge the German Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs to firmly anchor in school curricula the process of critically addressing the genocide and the German and European colonial past.

Berlin, 30 June 2015

Dr. Gregor Gysi and the parliamentary group

Explanatory memorandum

The declared war of extermination carried out by the imperial “protection force” (“Schutztruppe”) against the Herero and Nama in the former colony of German South-West Africa from 1904 to 1908 was the first genocide of the 20th century. It marked the start of a century that came to be so terribly characterised by mass destruction, “ethnic cleansing”, expulsions and genocide. One hundred years ago, Germany's colonial history in “South-West Africa” (now the Republic of Namibia) came to an end during the First World War when the German “protection force” surrendered to the Union of South Africa on 9 July 1915. Namibia had been occupied by colonial masters since 1884, and it was to remain so for another 75 years. It was just 25 years ago, on 21 March 1990, that the Republic of Namibia finally won its independence.

Memories of the genocide remain very much alive in the Namibian consciousness; its traces and scars are visible to this day. Remembrance of these German atrocities is a natural part of Namibian history, much more so than in Germany today.

In early 1904, the Herero, under the leadership of Samuel Maharero, organised an uprising against the oppression and increasing appropriation of land and livestock by their German colonial masters. The uprising developed into open warfare. After the German “protection force” emerged victorious from the Battle of Waterberg on 11/12 August 1904, German troops pursued tens of thousands of Herero men, women and children into the Omaheke desert. General Lothar von Trotha ordered that they be prevented by force from leaving the desert, with the intention of letting them die of thirst. On 2 October 1904 Trotha issued his famous extermination order: “Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I no longer shelter women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot.” Von Trotha was acting on the orders of the German Kaiser, and Chief of General Staff Alfred Graf von Schlieffen spoke of a “racial war” and expressly condoned the “destruction or complete servitude” of the Herero.

On 22 April 1905, another extermination order was issued against the Nama people, who had subsequently risen up. The Damara and San ethnic groups were hit similarly hard during these battles waged by the Germans. The San fell victim to the systematic violence carried out during so-called “Bushmen hunting”. While there were numerous victims in the massacres committed by the military during the war, many more people subsequently died long, agonizing deaths. By 1908, around 80 percent of the Herero people and half the Nama were dead as a result of executions and the consequences of expropriation, the excessive physical exertions of forced labour and disease caused by unhygienic conditions, malnourishment and the deliberate withholding of medical care in the concentration camps. The military leadership tolerated or even encouraged

the rape of women by German soldiers. Large quantities of human remains were stolen and taken to Germany for “racial science” research.

The land belonging to the rebellious ethnic groups was declared the property of the German state. The Herero, traditionally a people of livestock breeders, were forbidden from owning horses and cattle. Tens of thousands of animals were confiscated without any payment of compensation. This destroyed the survivors’ economic livelihood. The extremely unjust system of land distribution that still pervades in today’s eastern, central and southern Namibia has its historical origins in these land confiscations that took place when the country was a German colony.

At the 2004 commemoration ceremony in Namibia marking 100 years of the suppression of the Herero revolt, the then German Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, as a representative of the Federal Government, officially apologised to the victims’ descendants for the first time, stating: “The atrocities committed at that time would today be termed genocide – and nowadays a General von Trotha would be prosecuted and convicted. We Germans accept our historic and moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time. And so, in the words of the Lord’s Prayer that we share, I ask you to forgive us our trespasses.” And yet, neither the German Federal Government at that time nor any German Federal Government since has stood by those words. Instead, they have been qualified as a “private opinion” of the minister in question.

There has never been the necessary open dialogue on concrete steps towards reconciliation between the governments of Germany and Namibia and with victims’ associations. Instead, following the minister’s visit, the German Federal Government decided to double funding for German development cooperation with Namibia over the next five years. It also launched a “special” or “reconciliation initiative”, initially equipped with funds of €20 million. However, this was a unilateral move, made without consulting the Namibians on how the initiative should be organised and governed and how the funds should be spent. The goal of the initiative, funded by German development cooperation, was to promote local projects in the areas where the descendants of the victims of genocide live. Unfortunately, these people were rarely, if at all, included in the implementation of the special initiative, and complaints about this from the victims’ associations were ignored. The anticipated effects, particularly on the economy, never came about. There is now a lively debate in Namibia about whether development cooperation, which always has the character of unidirectional aid from donor to recipient, is really the appropriate channel in this case. Development cooperation is an entirely different matter to restorative justice, which, rather than being a form of aid, is the claim of an injured party arising from recognition of injustice suffered. Namibian stakeholders must play a much greater role in future measures. The goal should be to restore to the descendants of the victims the sustainable economic basis that their ancestors were robbed of over 100 years ago. This can be achieved by making structural improvements in their ancestral homelands, which would benefit all Namibians living in those regions today.

On 26 October 2006, the Namibian National Assembly reached a unanimous decision to define the atrocities and massacres carried out by German troops between 1904 and 1908 as genocide. The assembly called on the Namibian government to enter into a comprehensive and structured dialogue with the German Federal Government on all unresolved questions related to the issue and on appropriate compensation measures. However, for a long time the German Federal Government did not respond to this resolution, which was officially submitted on 15 November 2007. It was not until late September 2011 that Germany began returning the human remains of victims of the German extermination campaign to Namibia. Even then, the handover in Berlin’s Charité hospital degenerated into scandal when the German Federal Government failed to display the appropriate respect towards the delegation led by the Namibian Minister for Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture. At that time, the behaviour of the government was criticised both in Germany and in Namibia, and bilateral relations between the two countries rapidly cooled down. In 2014 there was another handover of human remains from the Medical Center of the University of Freiburg and from the Charité Berlin. It is assumed that many more human remains are stored in public and private archives and collections in Germany.

The Bundestag and the Federal Government must shoulder the task of finding appropriate means and ways to resolve the issue in concord with their Namibian partners – on the one hand to do justice to the historic responsibility that Germany bears towards Namibia, and on the other to ensure that the two countries can work on a shared future together. Alongside close dialogue between the two governments, this will entail

expanding and institutionalising the relations between the members of parliament in both countries. Furthermore, continued efforts must be made to address Germany's colonial past.