

17th March 2016: Debate on the issue of reconciliation with Namibia and the LEFT PARTY motion: “Reconciliation with Namibia – remembrance of and apology for the genocide in the former colony of German South-West Africa” (Bundestag Printed Paper 18/5407)

Vice-President Ulla Schmidt:

I call upon the agenda item 12a:

Consulting the recommended decision and the Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee (3rd Committee) on the request of deputies Niema Movassat, Wolfgang Gehrcke, Jan van Aken, other MPs and the parliamentary group of the LEFT PARTY

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

Printed Papers 18/5407, 18/6376

Following an inter-party agreement, 38 minutes are provided for the debate. - I do not hear complaints. Then it is so decided.

I open the debate. The word has the colleague Stefan Rebmann, SPD parliamentary group. (Applause from the SPD and by deputies of the CDU / CSU)

Stefan Rebmann (SPD):

Madam President, members of our all-female Chair, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. Even if history lessons while I was at school, or later during my daughters’ schooldays, or even today, unfortunately devoted and continue to devote little to no attention to the terrible things done to the people of what is now Namibia during the German Empire’s colonial rule, it is clear to everyone who examines this era in German South West Africa, as Namibia was then known, that the horrific racism, the clear intention to completely eradicate the Herero and Nama tribes and to torment the Damara and the San, the magnitude of the crimes, and ultimately also the macabre “success” of Germany’s so-called “Schutztruppen” not only mean that these events deserve greater attention in lessons today; we must also, I believe, call a spade a spade. What took place was genocide, and nothing else. There is no longer, I believe, any doubt about that, including internationally.

(Applause from the SPD and Members of the CDU/CSU, the Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)

Now, time and again, the argument is advanced that the massacres perpetrated at that time were self-evidently genocide as we understand it today, but because the definition of what constitutes genocide was not established by the UN until 1948, it cannot be applied retroactively or create any legal entitlements.

Colleagues, I say that targeted and systematic human rights violations, perpetrated in the most horrifying manner and on this scale, contravene the most elementary principles of

justice and morality, and did so even then. And so it is entirely appropriate to use the term genocide.

(Applause from the SPD, Members of the Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens, and Elisabeth Motschmann [CDU/CSU])

I am speaking here today as a specialist in development policy for my parliamentary group. Naturally, that also gives me an opportunity to clarify one or two matters. Our development cooperation, our projects in Namibia, are of great significance for the country and for the people of Namibia; and of course our very special relationship with this country owes much to our history. Since 1990, Germany has invested a significant amount of development funding in Namibia, more than 870 million euros, providing almost 82 million euros last year and in 2016.

Our engagement ranges from projects concerning the transport system and infrastructure, to economic development, to the health system and the management of natural resources. In addition, there is also the Namibian-German Special Initiative to promote reconciliation, and even micro-projects run by the German Embassy to reduce poverty, and these also provide very useful and visible aid. At the same time, we have quite a number of NGOs there: Bread for the World, the Protestant Development Service, and other private bodies to which we provide a significant amount of support invest over 1 million euros in the field of education there each year. Particularly with regard to education, it must be said that there are still significant shortcomings.

At the same time, however, Namibia's very positive development overall – we politicians specialising in development policy always hope that countries will develop in such a positive manner – and its categorisation as an upper-middle-income country mean that, in general, a great many development partners are pulling out of Namibia. And yet the need for support remains immense, particularly in the field of education, as I mentioned, and in relation to vocational training, poverty reduction, and efforts to tackle the unequal income distribution. I believe this makes our bilateral cooperation with Namibia in the field of development policy all the more important.

However, it is also clear, colleagues, that our development cooperation and our financial engagement in Namibia cannot be equated with an official admission by the Federal Government, nor are they a substitute for an official admission of historical guilt for this genocide.

(Applause from the SPD, Members of the CDU/CSU, and Niema Movassat [The Left Party] and Peter Meiwald [Alliance 90/The Greens])

The injustice inflicted, the humiliations to which people were subjected, and the horrendous suffering that was experienced – the consequences of which are still being felt by the population today – also require intensive joint steps to address this chapter in history. This includes a shared culture of remembrance and, crucially, joint efforts to promote reconciliation.

Our “Red Heidi”, as she is often called, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, offered the first apology for the atrocities and for this genocide during a visit to Namibia as Minister for Development in 2004. Our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has also, in my opinion, contributed to a change in thinking. I believe we are on the right

track, and that we will succeed in taking the final steps as well. Mr Polenz, as the rapporteur and negotiator for this matter, has our full support in this.

Colleagues, I believe it is time for us to face up to our responsibility.

Thank you.

(Applause from the SPD, Members of the CDU/CSU and Dr Frithjof Schmidt [Alliance 90/The Greens])

Vice-President Ulla Schmidt:

Thank you very much. - Next speaker is Mr Niema Movassat, parliamentary group THE Left Party.

(Applause from The Left Party)

Niema Movassat (The Left Party):

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by warmly welcoming the Namibian Ambassador to Germany, Andreas Guibeb, to today's debate. I am glad that you are here today.

(Applause from The Left Party, Members of the SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens, and Charles M. Huber (CDU/CSU))

Today's debate concerns one of the dark chapters in German history. Between 1904 and 1908, Germans perpetrated the first genocide of the 20th century in the former colony of German South West Africa, present-day Namibia. The victims were the Herero, Nama, Damara and San peoples. They were murdered, placed in concentration camps, made to perform brutal forced labour, or they were driven into the desert, including the women and children, and left to die of thirst.

On 4th November 1904, Lieutenant General von Trotha, who also issued the order for the extermination of the Herero people, wrote, and I quote:

...It has been and remains my policy to apply this force with utter terrorism and even cruelty. I shall destroy the rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood and money.

These words were the prelude to the extermination of almost 100,000 people. What took place was genocide. And that was denied in Germany for too long.

(Applause from The Left Party)

It took 107 years, until last year, for a German government to finally denounce those crimes as genocide. It really was high time. But I would also say: it is not enough. It is only the beginning for us here in Germany, where there is almost no culture of remembrance regarding the crimes committed in that era. It was here in Berlin that the colonial powers divided Africa up between them in 1885. It was here in Berlin that the decision to commit genocide was taken. Yet there is no memorial commemorating all of this. It really is time to finally change that.

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(Applause from The Left Party)

Now, a request was made for us to withdraw our motion today, in light of the negotiations which are currently taking place between the German and Namibian governments. There are three points I would like to make about this:

Firstly, if we had withdrawn our motion, no debate would be taking place here today. That would have been disrespectful towards the descendants of the victims, who are calling on the Bundestag to address these crimes.

Secondly, we would only have considered withdrawing our motion if there had been a joint motion submitted by all four parliamentary groups in the Bundestag. The coalition had months to take the appropriate steps. However, you did not even put forward a motion of your own. I must say, the remarks just made by our colleague Mr Rebmann in his speech would provide a basis for a joint motion.

(Applause from Members of the Left Party and Dr Ute Finckh-Krämer (SPD))

Thirdly, and this is the most important point. Yes, the negotiations between the two governments are ongoing. But they are secret negotiations, with no transparency and no interim results. What is at issue here, however, is reconciliation, not some trivial matter. And important issues must be decided in the German Bundestag; that is a principle of democracy. That is why I would say: it is good that the Federal Government and the Namibian government are finally talking to each other about the genocide. It would be better if the Federal Government were doing so on the basis of a clear mandate from the Bundestag.

(Applause from The Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)

In Namibia, a unanimous decision of the National Assembly has been in place since 2006. It refers to genocide and calls for reparations and tripartite talks between the governments with the involvement of the victims' groups. But the reality is that the groups representing the Herero and Nama victims are completely excluded from the negotiations. How can there be reconciliation without involving the descendants of the victims? Of course they belong at the negotiating table!

(Applause from The Left Party)

What is at issue in substantive terms? Firstly, Germany has still not apologised for this genocide even today. For decades, that has been a slap in the face of the people of Namibia. We finally need a clear decision by the Bundestag on this subject and a worthy gesture of apology by the Federal Government in Namibia.

(Applause from The Left Party)

Secondly, there is the matter of restorative justice, a subject which the Federal Government would prefer to ignore. The genocide and expropriations were not only a human catastrophe, they were also an economic disaster. Even now, 80 per cent of the farmland in Namibia is in white hands. The Herero and Nama had everything taken from them. They are still suffering the consequences today. They are among the poorest section of the population in Namibia. That is why we in the Left Party are proposing a structural fund to compensate for this injustice.

Let me clearly state that no line can be drawn under these events. The racist ideology of that era which led to the genocide is still deeply rooted in the minds of many descendants of the perpetrators, even today. Last Sunday's election results confirmed Bertolt Brecht's prophetic words all too clearly: "The womb he crawled from is still going strong."

On 21st March, Namibia will celebrate its Independence Day. That is also International Anti-Racism Day. It is the right time to finally take concrete steps towards reconciliation. For that reason, too, I appeal to you to support our motion.

Thank you.

(Applause from The Left Party)

Vice-President Ulla Schmidt:

Thank you very much. The next speaker is Elisabeth Motschmann, CDU/CSU parliamentary group.

(Applause from CDU/CSU)

Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU):

Madam President, Colleagues. The suppression of the uprising of the Herero and Nama on 11 August 1904 was genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century. There is no getting around that fact and nobody would seriously contest it.

The order that General Lothar von Trotha gave was so cruel that it hurts to repeat it here; but coming to terms with the past does hurt and indeed must hurt. I quote Trotha:

Within German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot; I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will have them shot. These are my words to the Herero people. The great General of the mighty German Emperor.

This was certainly not a great general, it was a cruel general, Ladies and Gentlemen. These words are inhuman – it is inconceivable that such words could have been uttered just over 100 years ago.

As we have heard, 70,000 Herero, eighty per cent of the entire Herero people, as well as half the Nama died on that occasion. Survivors were put in concentration camps, their land and cattle confiscated in 1906. Norbert Lammert called this genocide and a shameful crime.

It is in the national interest of the Federal Republic of Germany for us to address our own history critically and consciously. This is the only way of learning lessons for the future from the mistakes of the past. The events that took place in Namibia between 1904 and 1908 are almost forgotten today; but we must not forget them.

As long ago as 1989 the CDU-CSU-led coalition made efforts to address this history. Later in 2004, as we have heard, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul was the first representative of the Federal Republic to offer an official apology to the Herero and Nama. This was a sign

and a further step on the way to working with present-day Namibia to process these events.

By the way, there was also a conference in Bremen in the same year. My home city, Bremen, began very early on to grapple with this subject. We also have an anti-colonial memorial. In 2004 a symposium was held on the subject of “The Herero War – 100 years on”. That caused a stir, it was difficult. But nevertheless we started to tackle the subject.

What can we do? In recent decades Namibia has been a special focus of our development cooperation. Over the past 20 years between 740 and 800 million euro have flowed into Namibia. That is the highest per capita development aid in Africa. This money has been used to promote numerous projects and facilities to fight poverty and improve living conditions. Our colleague Mr Rebmann referred to this. There have been road building projects, cultural projects, scientific projects, training programmes, municipal projects, climate protection projects and much more. Much, therefore, has been done, and that is something I want to explicitly highlight here.

We saw how great the wish for reconciliation and forgiveness was on the Namibian side too when Namibia declared independence 26 years ago and the President expressed the wish for reconciliation and forgiveness in the Constituent Assembly in 1990.

With the nomination of our special representatives, Germany and Namibia took a further important step. The task of the special representatives is to find a way to enable further rapprochement and seek and find solutions. We should not pre-empt them. I, too, have complete confidence in Ruprecht Polenz, who has taken on this task.

The Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia expressed the wish for the parliamentary groups represented in the German Bundestag to deliver a joint motion. The Ambassador – if I understand him correctly – sees this as the way to initiate an objective and proper debate.

The Left Party is not complying with that wish. It has not withdrawn its motion, which I find out of order.

(Niema Movassat [Left Party]: We have no joint motion! We have had nothing from you!)

You fail to recognise that this subject in no way lends itself to tactical party political manoeuvring. I am taken aback by your attitude.

You can see how important the subject is to you from the fact that the chair of your parliamentary group, Sahra Wagenknecht, is not here. She’s busy launching her book.

(Laughter from the Left Party – Niema Movassat [Left Party]: So where is Mr Kauder? – Alexander Ulrich [Left Party]: What’s that about?)

– He didn’t table the motion. That’s the difference. You tabled the motion.

(Applause from CDU/CSU Members)

Vice President Peter Hintze:

Ms Motschmann.

Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU):

I'm coming to the end of my remarks. She is presenting her new book *Reichtum ohne Gier: Wie wir uns vor dem Kapitalismus retten* in Leipzig.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

I wasn't telling you that you had reached the end of your speaking time; you have a few seconds left. The Left Party wanted to interpose a question. You can accept or reject it, but you have to decide now.

Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU):

I suggest we engage in a lively exchange once I've finished.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

Okay.

(Niema Movassat [The Left Party]: brief intervention!)

Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU):

I would like to sum up by saying that of course we need to deal with and pursue this chapter in our country's history. We must do everything we can for mutual reconciliation and forgiveness. But we very definitely don't need lessons from the Left Party on addressing the past.

(Calls from the Left Party: Yes you do!)

You still have plenty to do in connection with your own past. You need to deal with that first.

I also think it would have been better for you to have been patient and wait until a joint motion was tabled by all the parliamentary groups.

(Peter Meiwald [Alliance 90/The Greens]: But you're not doing that!)

That would also be in line with what the Namibian Ambassador was suggesting.

Thank you very much.

(Applause from CDU/CSU and from Stefan Rebmann [SPD] – Peter Meiwald [Alliance 90/The Greens]: That's a cheek!)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

We now have a brief intervention by Niema Movassat from the Left Party parliamentary group.

Niema Movassat (The Left Party):

Thank you, Mr President. – Ms Motschmann, I was initially very pleasantly surprised by your speech, and especially what you said at the start.

(Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU): How nice!)

You say that this debate deserves to be conducted in dignity, without party-political squabbling. – And yet you were the first to engage in party-political squabbling. I said nothing to that effect, Mr Rebmann said nothing to that effect; it was you.

(Applause from The Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)

You ask where Ms Wagenknecht is. Let me ask you: where is Mr Kauder? Where is Mr Steinmeier? Where are those in positions of responsibility? I am happy to ask you the same question.

Incidentally, I would like to note that the Ambassador had indeed hoped for a joint motion. I understood what you just said – and I think our other colleagues did too – as an indication that you are willing to put forward a joint motion with us. I'm happy to take you at your word. I'm well aware that the CDU/CSU otherwise has significant problems with submitting motions together with the Left Party. Our doors are open. We look forward to drawing up a joint motion with you.

(Applause from The Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)

I believe you listened to my speech. I said quite clearly that if we had withdrawn our motion today, then there would have been no debate. – The Ambassador's letter expressly states that the debate here in the German Bundestag is followed very closely in Namibia. In other words, he and the Namibian government are also in favour of the debate being held here in the German Bundestag today. We responded to these wishes. It would not have been possible otherwise. And that is partly down to you, as you did not put forward a motion.

Thank you.

(Applause from The Left Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

Would you like to answer, Ms Motschmann? – Go ahead, Ms Motschmann.

Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU):

The motion was signed by Sahra Wagenknecht

(Alexander Ulrich [Left Party]: That is always the way with motions! How long have you been in parliament?)

and not by Mr Kauder. If the subject is so important to you, then I would expect the chair of your parliamentary group to have appeared here in the Bundestag rather than promote her own book in Leipzig.

(Applause from the CDU/CSU– Alexander Ulrich [The Left Party]: That's shameful! How long have you been in the Bundestag?)

– Perhaps you would let me finish. I let you finish what you wanted to say. That's good democratic practice.

(Nicole Gohlke [Left Party]: Interventions are also good democratic practice!)

We also have special representatives. I think that's a very good step. Ruprecht Polenz is highly experienced in foreign policy. We should await the outcome of his negotiations with the Namibian special representative. Then we can make further plans.

You say: your door is always open. – I'm very pleased about that.

(Ulle Schauws [Alliance 90/The Greens]: Are you?)

I'll gladly go through it. But this is not just about what I would like. This has to be agreed in a large parliamentary group with 310 Members – You can only dream of that – and we always undertake this painstaking but worthwhile task. Thank you.

(Applause from CDU/CSU – Ulle Schauws [Alliance 90/The Greens]: Who are you speaking for here? For yourself?)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

Dear colleagues, we now have the next speaker. Uwe Kekeritz speaks for the Alliance 90/The Greens. Mr Kekeritz, please (Alliance 90/The Greens):

Uwe Kekeritz (Alliance 90/The Greens):

Mr President! Esteemed colleagues. I would like to associate myself with the words of my colleague, Niema Movassat. Ms Motschmann, I didn't find your speech too bad but the last three sentences were totally off the mark and have created a tension here which is inappropriate to the subject.

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left Party)

Last month something astonishing happened in this house. Perhaps you may recall the excellent plenary debate on the genocide of the Armenians. We Greens withdrew our motion on that occasion in order to facilitate a joint cross-party motion. I think that was a very good course of action. The Coalition then agreed to table a cross-party motion. You will remember. Cem Özdemir stood up and went up to Mr Kauder,

(Dr Rolf Mützenich [SPD]: unforgettable!)

and Mr Kauder pledged that the Coalition would present an appropriate motion.

(Applause from Members of the Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left Party)

I believe that this process should stand as a model for the historically equally significant genocide in Namibia, particularly since in this case Germany alone bears responsibility.

(Applause from Stefan Rebmann [SPD])

So, the method is correct, and Ms Motschmann, if I have understood you correctly, the parliamentary groups in the Coalition would be prepared to draw up a joint motion. So, why not do it?

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens, Members of the Left Party and Dr Ute Finckh-Krämer [SPD])

That is why today we have withdrawn our motion on Germany's historical responsibility in Namibia. Thank you for leaving yours on the agenda so that we can discuss it. But that doesn't mean that you would not be prepared to join a joint motion, and this process is the right one.

(Alexander Ulrich [The Left Party]: But only if Mr Kauder signs!

– Oh, that's really a nonsensical argument; we don't need that.

(Applause from Member of the Bundestag Ulle Schauws [Alliance 90/The Greens])

I think it's clear. This house can only credibly investigate and address genocide if all parties work together in the process. Acknowledgement of guilt, remembrance and reconciliation do not accept party boundaries and that is why we count on the Coalition. I believe that the SPD will have no problem in doing that and I think the same applies to the CDU/CSU parliamentary group.

(Stefan Rebmann [SPD]: That can be quite difficult!)

The case of Armenia shows quite clearly that you can do it and that you also understand this.

The question has often been asked: So what shall we do? I believe that a joint motion must also demonstrate how a fitting framework for the official acknowledgement of guilt and the official apology can be established. I applaud the fact that in 2004 Ms Wiczeorek-Zeul seized the initiative, but it is not of course enough for a minister on a visit to say in passing: We are sorry; it was a crime.

(Stefan Rebmann [SPD]: She did that quite deliberately!)

That was a courageous step at the time, but now it is time for grand politics to follow.

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens)

The motion must also outline how the German public is to be informed of our historical responsibility and what steps are needed to turn the procedure verifiably into a public project. Particularly in the light of the last elections we should clearly emphasize that strong democracies need have no fear of addressing their own history; coming to terms with history and being ready to admit mistakes of the past are signs not of weakness but of strength.

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens, Members of the Left Party and Dr Ute Finckh-Krämer [SPD])

The process must be clear. I believe it should be located in the Federal Chancellery. They must create the conditions for a fitting framework. As I already said in the Bundestag during the last legislative period, I envisage an official ceremony in the German Bundestag to be addressed by the Federal President and to which the President of Namibia is invited. I also envisage a parallel event in Windhoek. In this way we can publicly address history and credibly show that we recognise our guilt and apologise for it.

(Applause from Members of the Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left Party)

It can no longer today be a matter of making compensation payments to individuals. Germany – as has been said – has been heavily committed in Namibia in development cooperation for many years. In this framework special funds can be made available for clearly defined projects which benefit the ethnic groups concerned and serve development in general. We do not need to talk about details here. That is not the job of parliament.

Since historical responsibility is always about responsibility for the future, too, such a motion must identify clear ways in which we can convey this responsibility in the future. The details as to how we can create and maintain an appropriate culture of remembrance in Germany must naturally be worked out by both countries together. We cannot do this here. But what we can decide here is that we will embark on this path; we have a responsibility for the present and also for the future. We must decide that we want to set out on this path.

To conclude, I would be delighted if we were to receive a clear signal - perhaps from the development policy spokeswoman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group - that you are prepared to table such a motion, as Volker Kauder recently did on the subject of the genocide of the Armenians, if we were to draw up this motion together and if you were prepared to take on board these few points that I have outlined here. Thank you.

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens and Members of the SPD)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

I was just about to tell you that the clock has been signalling for a minute that your time is up.

(Uwe Kekeritz [Alliance 90/The Greens]: I didn't hear that! – Shout by Stefan Rebmann [SPD]: Just like in committee!)

– We know that; good. We hope the other speakers will keep to time. I now give the floor to the next speaker, Dagmar Wöhr from the CDU/CSU parliamentary group.

(Applause from Members of the CDU/CSU and the SPD)

Dagmar G. Wöhr (CDU/CSU):

Mr President, Colleagues. In 2015 around 86,000 German tourists visited Namibia. The overwhelming majority travelled from overseas. Many will have gone there to enjoy the landscape. But most made the journey because of our shared history, our history with Namibia.

There is still a great deal of German culture in the former colony of German South West Africa. You can still find bakeries, Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte, lovingly renovated houses in Swakopmund, and you can still hear German being spoken, although the number of people whose mother tongue is German is declining. The German minority now accounts for less than one per cent of the population. When talking to people who have visited

Namibia or to German Namibians it is clear that a lot has changed and that German is slowly vanishing. German is being removed from teaching curricula, German names are disappearing from street signs. It appears that the Government feels the need to remove the signs of the colonial era.

Apart from these changes there is, one hears, another change, a change in voices, triggered not least by the debate, namely voices demanding acknowledgement of the genocide and expressing the wish for reparations. There are also reports that the peaceful coexistence of the descendants of the Germans and the descendants of the Herero may not be what it was in the past. Coexistence, we must understand, is being made more difficult by this discussion.

(Uwe Kekeritz [Alliance 90/The Greens]: By the discussion? Nonsense!)

It is reported that the Germans are now often referred to as foreigners and that in election campaigns there is talk of taking back the land on which the few remaining descendants of the Germans live.

Here, too, I believe, we have a job to do. We need to exert pressure in the dialogue process between our Government and the Namibian Government, which I believe has already made a good start, to ensure that the discussion does not become more radicalised. We had similar experiences in Zimbabwe. We don't want to go through the same thing a second time.

You will be familiar with the saying , “Am deutschen Wesen soll die Welt genesen”, (roughly “The German approach will cure the world”) or the saying “A place in the sun”? That was in the old days when the colonial powers were convinced of their own superiority, a not untypical viewpoint. Equality was not a subject discussed at that time. This was the background against which the unspeakable acts of cruelty perpetrated by General von Trotta were set. We have heard the figures: over 65,000 Herero killed and over 10,000 dead from the Nama tribe. This is a black chapter in our history which we have to face up to and for which we have a moral responsibility.

Nobody, I think, would deny the fact that 112 years after these murders were committed, they constitute genocide. But we must also see of course that the legal standards set by international law were not created until 1948. The law is the law. It is not therefore possible to make it retrospective and legal claims – I speak here as a lawyer – cannot be derived from it.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

Ms Wöhrl –

Dagmar G. Wöhrl (CDU/CSU):

Mr Kekeritz, perhaps I can answer your question. – We all condemn what happened back then. We have already said so in motions. This is not the first motion to be tabled. Motions were introduced in 1989 and 2004 in which the entire parliament of the time acknowledged guilt and responsibility.

(Niema Movassat [Left Party]: What kind of responsibility?)

We know that subjecting one's own history to critical examination is always also the prerequisite for reconciliation. That is why I am in favour of this subject being taught in

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schools. We must talk in history lessons about the colonial era, about our history and about the terrible things that happened in this context.

(Applause from Members of the CDU/CSU).

I believe it is important that we demonstrate our responsibility in development cooperation. The figure has been mentioned: 870 million euro. I accept that money is not everything in this context – we know that – but that is the highest development aid contribution per head of the population. We are active in many areas, for example transport and economic development. There is also a special initiative for reconciliation with funds totalling 36 million euro. We use this money in particular at municipal level in many small projects precisely in those areas where the descendants of the Herero live and where they benefit in particular.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

Do we want to allow a question or not?

Dagmar G. Wöhr (CDU/CSU):

Does Mr Kekeritz have something more to say?

(Uwe Kekeritz [Alliance 90/The Greens: Yes I'd like to!])

– Please continue.

Uwe Kekeritz (Alliance 90/The Greens):

We have not exhausted the subject even if you have moved on further in your remarks. This is not the first time we have discussed the genocide in Namibia. I have read about it and also taken part myself in discussions on the subject. There are mentions time and again of the famous year 1948 when genocide was actually defined. But if one were to use your logic, Ms Wöhr, this would mean that all the reparation payments made at the time in compensation for the crimes committed in the Third Reich were not right, because the definition of genocide was not formulated until 1948, that is to say three years after the genocide. What does such an exercise in definition mean in this context? I cannot refer to legal clauses which are obviously meaningful and then say that they have unfortunately come too late. I think this is a cynical way of dealing with the past. It really won't do.

(Applause from Alliance 90/The Greens and Members of the Left Party)

Dagmar G. Wöhr (CDU/CSU):

Mr Kekeritz, I have been speaking about the law. As a lawyer I naturally have to consider the basis for claims. I cannot invoke a basis for a claim if the legal basis has not been created until later. This means that we shall have to see if this comes to a settlement or reparations. A payment on the basis of the idea of reconciliation is another matter. That is what we are hoping for in our dialogue. We will await the outcome of the talks between our Government and the Namibian Government. But there can be no claim for a settlement arising from this legal standard defined in 1948, as has often been demanded. I just wanted to point this out again in this context.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

You now have another 45 seconds. I stopped the clock in the meantime.

Dagmar G. Wöhr (CDU/CSU):

Thank you, Mr President.

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

You're welcome.

Dagmar G. Wöhr (CDU/CSU):

Briefly, just one more point: the return of the bones. This is something colleagues have not yet mentioned. I would therefore like to say a few words which I think are absolutely necessary. I believe the museums are ready and willing to return these bones. Two consignments of bones have already been returned in 2011 and 2015. There are of course a number of reasons why the return of further bones has faltered. One of the reasons unfortunately was that the Embassy was not staffed in 2005, so that it was not possible to ensure the bones would receive a really reverent and dignified reception. Also in the case of many bones there is unfortunately no proof that they really come from Namibia. Nevertheless I think it is important we don't lose track of this subject in this context.

I can tell you, dear colleagues, that the dialogue process is progressing. We hope it will reach a satisfactory conclusion. We will have to await the outcome. But I think it is important that we allow the dialogue a certain time frame. Due care is really more important in this context than speed. It is up to us, the Namibian Government and the descendants of the Herero to work in collaboration and peacefully to shape the future positively in respectful remembrance of the past. Thank you for your attention.

(Applause from CDU/CSU and Members of the SPD)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

I call on the next speaker, Dr Ute Finckh-Krämer, SPD parliamentary group

(Applause from SPD)

Dr Ute Finckh-Krämer (SPD):

Mr President, Esteemed Colleagues, Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen in the galleries. As a politician in the field of foreign policy I know about the reconciliatory effect of culture. Ms Wöhr, the Goethe-Zentrum in Namibia was converted on 1 January this year into a Goethe Institut. I believe that Namibia recognises the significance of this step.

The debate thus far has shown that we are agreed that the crimes committed by German troops against the Herero, Nama, Dama and San between 1904 and 1908 constituted genocide. We are also agreed that for this reason Germany has a historical and moral responsibility for Namibia as a whole and for the descendants of the survivors in particular. What we do not agree on is how we can best meet this responsibility. I would therefore like to draw your attention to a project which I think can act as an example.

The project was developed by a peace and conflict researcher in 2003, that is to say before the Bundestag Resolution of June 2004 and the special initiative in 2005, and run in collaboration with a variety of experts until 2009. The German experts involved asked representatives of various Namibian organisations, for example the churches and the Ombudsman's Office, what burdens from the past they believed still needed to be addressed. In addition to the consequences of the crimes committed by German colonial troops against the Herero, Nama, Damara and San in the colonial war, those questioned also referred to the effects of the colonial era and apartheid regime, violent conflicts within the SWAPO liberation movement and conflicts arising from the different experiences of those who were forced to live temporarily in exile.

Based on this, the researchers then developed a project to build competences in conflict management/mediation, crisis intervention and reconciliation. German judges, lawyers, social workers, ethnologists and mediators trained representatives of Namibian NGOs, the Ombudsman's Office, the SWAPO Women's Council Executive Committee and the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs and Defence in crisis intervention, conflict management/mediation and governance. Since the funding programmes of the Federal Government which were potentially suitable at least at that time did not allow rapid funding of a project of this kind, it was financed by private donations. In retrospect this enhanced the credibility of the Germans involved but at the same time limited the scope of the project.

The training was carried out in mixed teams which were first trained in mediation and reconciliation work. Then in a structured process they enlisted and trained further experts in the municipalities concerned and parallel to that initiated initial encounters in and with the groups concerned. This process involved a sharing of experiences and the lasting impact on individuals and society up to the present day, as well as discussion of discrimination and identification of needs. The further procedure was then adapted on the basis of what had been learned.

The project ended in 2009 because there was no more funding. The contacts are still maintained, and the need remains. The project could therefore be continued, building on what has already been accomplished in past years, if we Members of the Bundestag exert pressure for continuation of the project using federal funds. To do so we should work on a cross-party basis, even if today we reject the Left Party's motion. Thank you.

(Applause from the SPD and Members of the CDU/CSU)

Vice-President Peter Hintze: The last speaker in this debate is Member of the Bundestag Charles M. Huber, CDU/CSU parliamentary group.

(Applause from CDU/CSU)

Charles M. Huber (CDU/CSU):

Mr President! Ladies and Gentlemen. Dear Colleagues. Your Excellency! Excellency, I don't know, if it's you up there, but I think so, I can't identify you. I don't know if you're even present.

(Shout from the SPD: Up there!)

– Nice to see you, brother.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The Greens were right to have complied with the Namibian Government's request for them to withdraw their motion. Our colleagues from the Left Party parliamentary group have not done that. I believe this wish should have been respected rather than an attempt made to place unnecessary obstacles in the way of a deepening of the generally very positive bilateral dialogue between our Government and the Government of Namibia.

Germany and Namibia are linked by a special partnership and a great responsibility resulting from this history. These facts are not disputed. This is also reflected in numbers, as has been repeatedly expressed: our Government made new pledges in the framework of development cooperation in October 2015 totalling 69.9 million euro. Up to 2015 the total value of the pledges to Namibia from the Federal Government was 870 million euro.

In 2004 Germany pledged 36 million euro of financial cooperation in a special initiative to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Waterberg. Namibia has 2.4 million inhabitants. So I think you can do quite a lot with this sum. If this amount were paid to Nigeria, for example, with its 160 million inhabitants, you could rightly talk about a drop in the ocean. That is not the case here.

When I say that one could get quite a lot moving with this sum, I am thinking, for example, about improving the quality of education and training, which is a problem in Namibia in all areas of education. Namibia is a beautiful country, which is why capacity building in the area of tourism would be another concrete starting point.

I would also like to say quite generally that in comparison with other nations such as China or other European countries, Germany demands virtually no concessions from industry in the various African countries. I think this is a point that needs making here.

With regard to the sense of your motion, dear colleagues from the Left Party parliamentary group, and the fact that you did not wish to comply with the wishes of the Namibian side, I would like to make the following observation. While your – so to speak – Namibian counterpart, the Workers Revolutionary Party, is demanding acknowledgement of guilt with respect to the genocide, it does not recognise the bilateral agreement between the Namibian Government and the Federal Government. On the contrary, it describes it in its jargon as an imperialist gesture which

(Niema Movassat [The Left Party]: Mr Huber, I don't even know the party!) –

Let me finish, even if it hurts – overlooks those who have been damaged.

(Uwe Kekeritz [Alliance 90/The Greens: That really hurts. It hurts to listen to you!)

I quote from a publication by Chief Riruako, the representative of the Herero Nation. I think the language repertoire of parliament across the parties and parliamentary groups is good enough to be able to dispense with the use of translators: The German state increasingly insisted on doing its business solely with the Namibian Government and not with the parties to the dispute: the Nama and the Herero Nations.

Dear Colleagues, the choice of the word “business” in the context of reparation payments and in relation to the genocide discussion highlights a number of critical intellectual scenarios for me. I say this in particular because this will also mean that in the event that we are able to make an accommodation directly with the Namibian Government, we cannot necessarily count on the fact that the matter will also be settled for the ethnic groups concerned. There is, if I may so, a need for clarification here.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am at the end of my speaking time. I think that this debate is, God knows, too serious for it to be used by particular parties for image purposes.

(Uwe Kekeritz [Alliance 90/The Greens: Bravo! Huber has understood! Shameful, shameful) –

Mr Kekeritz, he can talk! Please have the courtesy to allow me here at least to bid farewell to our guests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I think that the black African population in Namibia will be the least to benefit if our mutual relations in relation to this subject were to break down because of the fixation on a single issue. I thank my colleagues from the Opposition for listening.

(Applause from CDU/CSU)

Vice-President Peter Hintze:

I bring this debate to a close.

We now come to the recommendation for a resolution submitted by the Foreign Affairs Committee with respect to the motion tabled by the Left Party entitled “Reconciliation with Namibia – Commemorating and apologising for the genocide in the former colony of German South West Africa”. The committee recommends in its recommendation for a resolution in printed paper 18/6376 that the motion tabled by the Left Party in printed paper 18/5407 be rejected. Who votes in favour of the recommendation of the Committee? Who votes against? Who abstains? The recommendation for a resolution is passed with the CDU/CSU and SPD parliamentary groups voting in favour, the Left Party voting against and the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group abstaining.

Translated by Liz Doyle and Emma Hardie in collaboration with the language service of the German Bundestag
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17th March 2016: Debate on the issue of reconciliation with Namibia and the LEFT PARTY motion: “Reconciliation with Namibia – remembrance of and apology for the genocide in the former colony of German South-West Africa” (18/5407)