

# **Genocide cannot be subject to prescription!**

*Appeal to the Members of the German Bundestag for recognition of and compensation for the genocide in the former colony of "German South-West Africa", today's Republic of Namibia*

**We – the Black and white initiatives, organisations and institutions of the civil society signed below – welcome the conciliatory approach adopted by the German Federal Government as demonstrated by the visit to Namibia by the Director General of African Affairs from the Federal Foreign Office in early February 2012. We also welcome the resulting commencement of direct talks with committees representing the descendants of the victims of the German genocide of 1904-08. We consider this overdue willingness to engage in dialogue with bodies of representatives of the affected peoples as a first indispensable step towards reconciliation between the peoples in Namibia and Germany.**

**With this resolution we express our heartfelt compassion for the suffering inflicted on the Namibian peoples, especially the Ovaherero, Nama, Damara and San. We are grateful for their generous readiness to engage in discussions with the descendants of the perpetrators and declare our solidarity with their commitment to "restorative justice" – a form of justice which can only become reality through Germany's sincere willingness to offer reparations. We support their efforts to secure official recognition of the genocide by the German Bundestag and the German Federal Government. We align ourselves assertively with their demand for symbolic and material compensation for the colonial and racist injustices inflicted upon their peoples and for their severe losses of goods and chattels.**

**We request the Members of the German Bundestag to:**

- ✧ counteract every future denial of the genocide in the former colony of "German South-West Africa", which according to the criteria of the UN Genocide Convention in 1948 must unquestionably be classed as genocide, and – as in the case of the genocide of the Jews – to campaign for its retroactive recognition by Germany;
- ✧ move the German Federal Government to comply with the commitments made by Germany and the resolutions agreed upon at the UN World Conference on Racism in Durban in 2001, and to apologise officially and unequivocally to the descendants of the victims of the German genocide for the genocide and for the associated crimes against humanity perpetrated against their ancestors;
- ✧ enter into a regular and intensive dialogue with the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia and the committees representing the descendants of the victims to address the questions connected to reconciliation such as, among others, the critical reappraisal of and reparations for the colonial and racist injustices Germany is responsible for and the grave consequences for the descendants of the victims, which, to this day, have still not been overcome – and to bring about concrete actions;
- ✧ establish a public foundation for the critical reappraisal of the genocide and of German colonialism as a whole, as well as for the promotion of a post-colonial

remembrance culture, and to commission the foundation, among other things, to:

- foster scientific debate on the genocide and its consequences within the framework of Namibian-German research projects;
  - disseminate knowledge in the German public and in schools about colonialism, racism and their consequences;
  - facilitate exchange projects which contribute towards reconciliation between the people of both countries as well as fighting racism;
  - support the decolonisation of public space in Germany (put a stop to the continued glorification of colonial criminals with street names and memorials and instead pay tribute to key figures of African resistance);
- ✦ prompt the German Federal Government to continue constructively its current talks with the Namibian Government and with the committees representing the descendants of the victims;
  - ✦ prompt the German Federal Government to enter into a dialogue with the Namibian Government and with the committees representing the descendants of the victims and to come to agreements on suitable financial and structural acts of compensation for the heavy economic losses of land, cattle and other possessions of the affected peoples;
  - ✦ prompt the German Federal Government to effect the agreed reparations unconditionally i.e. without meddling in the free decisions of the Namibian state and the committees representing the descendants of the victims regarding their application.

Berlin, 7 March 2012

AfricAvenir International  
Afrika-Rat Berlin-Brandenburg  
Afrika-Rat Nord  
AFROTAK TV cyberNomads  
Artefakte//anti-humboldt  
Berliner Entwicklungspolitischer Ratschlag (BER)  
Berlin Postkolonial  
Deutsch-Afrikanische Gesellschaft Berlin (DAFRIG)  
Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD-Bund)  
Solidaritätsdienst International (SODI)

For initiatives, organisations and institutions also wishing to sign, please contact:  
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Further signatures and information: [www.restitution-namibia.de](http://www.restitution-namibia.de)

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## Background to the resolution

On 30 September 2011 at the Charité in Berlin the mortal remains of 20 Ovaherero and Nama – men, women and children who were murdered by white Germans over 100 years ago – were restituted to their descendants visiting from Namibia. It was the first time that a German institution had ever agreed to such a ceremony. Thousands of mortal remains shipped to Germany during colonial times and abused for inhuman, racist and pseudoscientific research, which denied the homogeneity between African men and women and white men and women, are still stored here.

Like most of the mortal remains stolen in this way, those returned in autumn 2011 originated from people who fought to defend themselves against colonial rule. Because they led resistance against repression, rape, expropriation and eviction they were condemned to death along with thousands other Ovaherero and Nama in the concentration camps of the colony "German South-West Africa". Many people were shot, hanged or cast into the desert to die of thirst. The few survivors had their personal possessions taken from them; their land and cattle were confiscated. In the field of serious historical research there exists a broad consensus today that the approach of the imperial "*Schutztruppe*" of the Kaiser ("colonial protection force") must be classed as genocide due to its deliberate intention and acts of elimination.

The German Government subduces its historical responsibility as the legal successor of the German Reich. It does acknowledge an unspecific "historical and moral responsibility towards Namibia". However, it is as yet neither ready to officially acknowledge the genocide nor willing to apologise formally to the descendants of the victims. By stressing its "intensive" German-Namibian development cooperation (Amount in 2010: 15.80 Euros per capita in Namibia), every request for symbolic and material compensation ("restorative justice") for the affected peoples has been rejected. Until recently the German Government was not even willing to engage in direct talks with the descendants of the victims.

This irresponsible attitude sparked a scandal in autumn 2011 at the restitution ceremony of the Namibian mortal remains at the Charité in Berlin. Not only did the Federal Foreign Office shift responsibility for the execution of the restitution almost completely onto the University Hospital in Berlin. Instead it assisted as a "guest" at the moving ceremony, represented only by its visibly overstrained Minister of State, Cornelia Pieper (FDP). Even in the face of the victims of German colonialism neither did she utter the word "genocide" nor did she plead for forgiveness. Immediately after making her contribution she left the auditorium without listening to the speeches of the Namibian guests.

Even during the event it became clear that members of the public taking part in the ceremony would not be prepared to accept the moral and ethical shortcomings of the Minister of State in the Federal Foreign Office without a word of protest. In particular representatives of the African diaspora and Black Germans reacted to her speech with heckling and silent protest. After the moving words of the Namibian Minister of Culture Kazenambo Kazenambo, as well as the speeches of high-ranking representatives of the Ovaherero and Nama, the representative of an alliance of various Black and white non-governmental organisations conclusively pleaded forgiveness for the genocide committed by Germany – and for the humiliating conduct of the Federal Foreign Office. On account of its efforts to initiate an open dialogue between the Namibian delegation and German policymakers the civil society alliance has, as a result, been publicly attacked, rebuked and defamed repeatedly – most

notably, in parliament – by employees from the Federal Foreign Office.



**The German Federal Government has finally had to depart from its intransigent stance. In light of the commitment shown by the Namibian Government, the victim groups of the Ovaherero and Nama, the civil society alliance and members of parliament from all opposition parties in Germany, the Director General of African Affairs from the Federal Foreign Office, Walter Lindner, was sent to Namibia in early February 2012. Whilst there he apologised for the conduct of the German Government on the occasion of the restitution of the mortal remains in autumn 2011. Furthermore, by gathering for talks with the committees representing the descendants of the victims of the Herero and Nama one of their primary demands – direct participation in the Namibian-German dialogue concerning the genocide and its compensation – was respected for the first time ever.**