

Federal Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul statement on being awarded the Peter  
Beier Prize of the State Church Authority of Dusseldorf

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Vote of thanks on the award of the Peter Beier Prize of the State Church Authority of  
Dusseldorf

24 May 2005

Dear President Schneider  
Dear Bishop Kameeta  
Dear Mr. Erhard Eppler  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

D) Vote of thanks in memory of my Namibia trip in 2004

I have to thank you in many ways: for the invitation, prize award and eulogy. The award of the Peter Beier Prize is a great honour, indeed, with Peter Beier being a good example for responsibility we have for One World and the conciliation of people beyond national boundaries.

I am delighted that Erhard Eppler has looked for praising words and found them, development policy and programmes being the work that links us.

You characterized politics sometimes as an activity reaching the limits of human efficiency. You did accept annoyance and, being a guiding intellectual force, latecomers did not serve you as an example. I am so happy that you are here!

I am deeply touched to receive such high recognition for an effort being at my heart – the effort to heal the still open wounds of the colonial past. And I am delighted that Bishop Kameeta is here, too.

Last August we attended together the commemorative ceremony on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Herero Rebellion against the German colonial forces.

No other trip has been linked to so many preparations, talks, resistance – and – approval, finally. No other trip has touched me as much as this.

In 1904 today's Namibia was a colony of settlers. The native population was deprived of its rights, robbed of its land and helpless against the arbitrary use of power. Degrading conditions of life provoked the Herero rebellions.

The German colonial forces under the command of General von Trotha reacted with unbelievable severity. The notorious order to shoot was as follows: *“Shoot every Herero – Do not spare women and children either.”*

The Waterberg Battle of 1904 was a disgrace. Surviving Hereros, Namas and Damaras were crammed into the desert where many of them died of hunger and thirst.

Other surviving Hereros, Namas and Damaras were packed in a camp and subjected to forced labour. Many of them did not survive the degradation and brutality.

Today, such atrocities are rightfully called a genocide.

Knowing that only in 1995 a delegation of the German Federal Parliament had expressed an apology, I left on my journey.

On 14 August 2004 I had the opportunity to speak at the commemoration celebrations – and, more so, to listen to what was said!

Representing the German Federal Government, I did call the cruelties of German colonialism by their name. The liberation struggle of the Herero and Nama merits to be remembered by us.

I did admit the historical-political and moral-ethical responsibility and blame of the Germans and I did ask for forgiveness in a joint “Prayer of the Lord”.

Minister Pohamba and Herero Paramount Chief Riruako accepted the apology. I will never forget these precious moments.

The representatives of the Herero said to me: “You have broken the wall of silence – now we can enter into the dialogue.”

When I reported on my trip at the German Bundestag in September last year, I received an overwhelming applause from the majority of the Members of the House. The critics and the anxious lost their voice. I was very happy to receive wide approval in other places, too.

I would like to understand this Prize as a consent on the conciliation of our peoples.

## II) The conciliation initiative

Conciliation is only possible if we remember. Memory should not build walls but open up new ways.

The process of conciliation now requires more action, enabling conciliation to be experienced and lived.

In talks with our Namibian partners we developed a concrete initiative which will be supported and promoted by the governments of both countries. All parts of the society should have the possibility to get involved – nobody will be excluded.

This initiative will create a framework for the bilateral commitment to strengthen the friendship between our countries, to heal the wounds of the past and to promote conciliation.

A broadly engaged conciliation committee will be the core of this initiative and its steering body, government representatives of both countries playing a leading role in it.

The Lord Mayor and President of the Senate of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, Dr. Henning Scherf, expressed his willingness to cooperate actively in this initiative. I should be delighted if he could be nominated as the official representative of the Federal Government for this initiative and represent the Federal Government in the Conciliation Committee.

It is of great importance to us that the Namibian civil society be represented in the initiative. Gender representatives of the Herero, Nama and Damara will ensure that most of all those population groups who have suffered under German colonial rule, will be represented.

The Namibian Churches, non-governmental organizations and the German-speaking population group will also be represented.

The Conciliation Committee will assume the major political tasks and, most of all, promote the conciliation dialogue and monitoring of the initiative. A conciliation fund will be established. The use of funds will be considered and decided upon by the Conciliation Committee. Criteria for the approval of contributions to the project will be determined and the respective projects be approved.

My Ministry will provide the adequate basic financial infrastructure for the conciliation fund as well as the required management capacities for the initiative.

We will provide a total amount of 20 million Euro over a period of 10 years (2006-2015), in other words, 2 million Euro annually. Additional public and private financial sources are welcome, especially once the start-up phase has been initiated without delay.

Dear Bishop Kameeta – so you see: We have taken up the proposal made by you and Bishop Keding to introduce a Panel on Reconciliation. Thank you so much for your commitment and willingness to guide and shape this important process.

My hopes are attached to the conciliation fund and that it will become a concrete development initiative in the settlement areas of the Herero, Nama and Damara.

Such development initiatives will enable community development and the implementation of communal infrastructural projects. Training programmes can be financed as well. Economic impulses on local level are very important in this regard.

Other focal areas of the funds are education and training, e.g., the promotion of professional/vocational training and cultural initiatives. I would like to involve young people in this initiative. Encounters between young people from Germany and

Namibia should be promoted, for example, through tertiary education bursaries for talented Namibian youths.

The creation of communal cultural centres should be supported within the context of cultural promotion. I had the opportunity to open officially the first institution in this line of cultural promotion: the Okakarara Cultural Centre was inaugurated – financed with German funds. Okakarara should mean for the young people: “Meeting each other and holding each other in high esteem.”

The Centre is operational and initial cultural events with student gender representatives have taken place and exhibitions are planned.

We can see that the dialogue initiated last year does bear fruit. This has been visible in many talks and workshops on the preparation of the initiative. The general “climate” of social interaction between and with different population groups has improved. The openness for discussions without prerogatives and the expression of tolerance have clearly grown. Inhibitions can be removed in a constructive dialogue, enabling trust to grow. All these developments are a reason for joy, gratitude and confidence.

### III) Development cooperation with Namibia

German-Namibian relations are good and characterized by mutual appreciation.

This special responsibility is expressed in our development cooperation. Namibia receives highest per-capita contributions in Africa within the framework of bilateral development cooperation with Germany.

Germany is the most important bilateral donor for Namibia with an annual current allocation of +/- 12 million Euro. We intend to expand this commitment and double our annual contributions, in other words, grant on average +/- 24 million Euro annually.

This is a clear political signal.

We have agreed with our partners to focus on three following core areas of cooperation:

- The land reform process – being a focal point of “rural development and resource management”;
  - Improving the transport infrastructure;
  - Promoting the economy;
- combating HIV/AIDS also has a high priority.

With these focal areas of cooperation and our financially reinforced commitment we can make a contribution towards reducing poverty in Namibia.

Conciliation, partnership and solidarity can make our common hope and obligation a reality: - *Achieving a fairer and better world.*

Thank you so much.