

**THE POLICIES, STRATEGIES, ACTIONS AND
OMISSIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC OF GERMANY - ONE YEAR AFTER THE
OHAMAKARI “APOLOGY”**

BY: ADV. VEKUII RUKORO*
DATE: 27TH AUGUST 2005
**OCCASION: FUNDRAISING DINNER FOR THE
OVAHERERO GENOCIDE COMMITTEE
AT OKAHANDJA**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am greatly honoured to have been asked by the organizers of this event, to share with you an analysis of the strategies being pursued by the German Government after the “apology” offered last year by Hon. Minister Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, on 14 August 2004 at Ohamakari.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

- 1.1 On that day, the German Minister offered what she described as an “apology” on behalf of her government for the humiliation, persecution and ultimately the intentional mass murder of the Ovaherero people at the hands of German colonial troops.
- 1.2 Our then Minister of Lands, who subsequently became our Head of State, H.E. Pohamba, and the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero, Chief Riruako, in good faith accepted that “apology” on behalf of the Namibian people in general and the Ovaherero in particular, respectively.
- 1.3 Most Namibians, including our Government, believed that the “apology” was a genuine one and that it would be followed up immediately by purposeful and results-oriented negotiations between the two protagonists, while the Namibian Government would be an active and

interested Observer. The subject matter of the negotiations was and remains very clear to all, namely: to address the long-standing, well-founded, legitimate demand for reparations of the Ovaherero people in respect of the genocide perpetrated against their ancestors.

1.4 Why only Ovaherero people and not others? Because:

- 1.4.1 the Ovahereros were the ones who were exclusively and specifically targeted by the officially proclaimed Extermination Order of General Lothar von Trotha;
- 1.4.2 the Ovaherero people through their leadership have, for decades, been the only people to demand both an official apology and reparations from the German Government;
- 1.4.3 the Ovaherero leadership have had the courage of their convictions to institute legal action against the German Government and German companies in the United States;
- 1.4.4 the Ovaherero people were the only tribe in the history of our Nation to have lost up to 80% of its people as a direct consequence of an officially proclaimed genocide policy of the German Government.

1.5 The Ovaherero people acknowledge fully that other Namibian tribes also suffered at the hands of German Colonialism. They also acknowledge and stand ready to support the right of other groups to petition the German Government if and when their leaders so decide. However, it is not for the Ovaherero leaders to speak on others' behalf. In as much as the Ovaherero people stand ready to support the case of others, similarly, they expect that other groups will not allow themselves to be used by the German Government and others to frustrate and/or deny the legitimate demands of the Ovaherero people.

2. GERMAN STRATEGIES SINCE OHAMAKARI 2004

2.1 After the Ohamakari “apology” the German Government, contrary to expectations, did not enter into negotiations with the Ovaherero people to entertain their demand for reparations. Instead the German Government launched a multi-faceted campaign to derail our case with the active, yet, ill-conceived connivance of its local agent provocateurs.

2.1.1 The German Government proceeded to completely re-define the issue between itself and the Ovaherero people from being “**reparations negotiations**” to what it now calls a “**reconciliation dialogue**” or “**reconciliation initiative**”;

2.1.2 Instead of the “**negotiating teams**” of the two protagonists coming together to trash out a formal agenda, the German Government is about to launch what it calls a “**Panel of Reconciliation**” consisting of a motley collection of characters with dubious agendas;

2.1.3 Instead of responding to and addressing the demands of the Ovaherero people for multi-billion dollars in reparations, the German Government has unilaterally resolved to create a so called “**Reconciliation Fund**” of some 20 million Euros (N\$160m) over the next ten (10) years, i.e. N\$16 m per year! The purpose of the so-called “Reconciliation Fund” is to grant “project subsidies” for approved projects in areas inhabited by Namas, Damaras and Ovahereros!

2.1.4 The German Government is also allegedly resorting to unorthodox means of exploiting whatever signs of divisions amongst the traditional leaders of the Ovaherero people in a typical colonial fashion of “divide and rule”.

2.2 What is the response of the Ovaherero people to all these?

2.2.1 They feel cheated and betrayed! They feel angry that their good faith acceptance of the German “apology” is being misused to buy time while new imperialist designs are being engineered with the active collaboration of misguided local agents masquerading in various guises.

2.2.2 They are determined, more than are ever before, that their legitimate demand will not die even if it takes another 100 years! Future generations of Ovahereros will continue to escalate this demand until the terms of settlement become progressively worse for future generations of Germans.

2.2.3 They also feel that the unilaterally determined amount of N\$160 million payable over a ten (10) year period constitutes a criminal insult and gross insensitivity towards, not only the Ovahereros, Namas and Damaras, but also the Namibian Governments itself! The Ovahereros are adamant that such insulting attitude and behaviour of the German Government will not be left unchallenged; German Governments – past, present and future, will not be allowed to get away with murder, let alone genocide!

3 CONCLUSION:

3.1 Clearly, the above policies, strategies, behaviour and attitude of the German Government raise a number of fundamental questions:

3.1.1 Is the FRG Government seriously committed to bringing about an honourable closure to this shameful chapter of its colonial history in Namibia?

- 3.1.2 Was the “apology” offered by the honourable Minister Wieczorek-Zeul at Ohamakari a genuine one or was it merely a public relations exercise in bad taste?
- 3.1.3 What is the per capita **reparations** paid by the FRG Government over the years to the Jews for the genocide committed against their ancestors compared to the proposed per capita **reconciliation payments** earmarked for the Namas, Damaras and Ovahereros collectively, via the 20 million Euros?
- 3.1.4 In the light of the above, what reasonable conclusion can the average African person draw from the FRG Government’s differentiated attitude and behaviour other than that it is motivated by patently racist considerations?
- 3.1.5 If the above conclusion is correct, is the FRG Government a fit and proper candidate for permanent membership of the Security Council of the United Nations - an Organisation that is based on strong anti-racist principles?
- 3.1.6 Finally, in the light of all of the above, which self-respecting political leader of Namibia or traditional leader of the Namas, Damaras and Ovahereros will even consider accepting the petty bribe of 20 million Euros offered by the German Government at a public rally in Germany?

3.2 The overwhelming majority of Namibians know the answers to the above questions and such knowledge will shape the nature of future relations between the people of Namibia and the Government of the FRG for many, many years to come.

3.3 For the Ovaherero people it remains: “Aluta Continua!” In simple terms it means:

- * an unambiguous and genuine official apology to be extended to the Ovaherero people by an appropriate organ of the German State;

- * the entering into unconditional, purposeful and direct negotiations with representative leaders of the Ovaherero people to discuss their demand for reparations. Nothing short of this will satisfy the present or future generations of Ovahereros; the sooner the FRG Government and others accepted this reality, the better for all concerned!

I thank you!

*This statement is made by Vekuii Rukoro in his personal and private capacity as a proud descendant of the Rukoro warriors who fought heroically in the Great War of Resistance against German colonial forces.