

Address by Senator Dr Carsten Brosda
Senate Reception for the Herero- and Nama Delegation
of the Second Transnational Herero and Nama Congress,
06.04.2018, 11.00 hrs, Rathaus, Kaisersaal (Hamburg)

Chief Kooper,
 Mrs. Chairman Muinjangué,
 Guests from Namibia and the USA,
 Mrs. Choukri, Mr. Gläser and the organizing committee of „Quo Vadis Hamburg“,
 Mr. Della,
 Professor Zimmerer,
 Ms. Ndjiharine,
 Ms. Brandt,
 Guests from far and near,

It is an honour to welcome you today on behalf of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg on the occasion of the Second Transnational Herero and Nama Congress. I would like to begin with a longish quotation:

“In essence, the nature of all colonialism is the exploitation of a foreign people to the highest degree. Wherever we look in the history of colonialism in the past three centuries, we find violence and the oppression of the tribes concerned, not infrequently culminating in their total extermination. And the driving motive is always the acquisition of gold, gold, and yet more gold.”¹ (end quote)

These clear words were not penned by the Cameroonian philosopher *Achille Mbembe*, who in his “Critique of Black Reason” published in 2013 presented a shrewd analysis of the links between capitalism, colonialism and racism.² No, these words were spoken on 26 January 1889 by August Bebel in his capacity as a social democrat member of the Berlin Reichstag. Just four years earlier – and only a few hundred metres away – European powers had met for the Berlin West Africa Conference and, through German mediation, created the conditions for the complete colonial partitioning of Africa. In his speech, Bebel seemed to anticipate the dreadful *war crimes* that German colonial forces would commit against the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa a few years later, from 1904 to 1908. In the Reichstag on 19 March 1904, shortly after the outbreak of the war, Bebel condemned the German colonial forces’ *“barbaric warfare, in contradiction of the whole of international law”* in the strongest possible terms.³ In a further speech on 30 January 1905 he expressed his unreserved solidarity with the

¹ August Bebel: Reichstagsrede gegen die Kolonialpolitik in Deutsch-Ostafrika, 26.01.1889. (http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2877&language=german, 04.04.2018)

² Achille Mbembe: Kritik der schwarzen Vernunft. Bonn 2016.

³ August Bebel zitiert nach: Heinz Karl: Vor 100 Jahren: Aufstand des Herero-Volkes gegen deutsche Kolonialherren. Hervorhebung nicht im Original. 2004. (http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/politik/publikationen/kpf-mitteilungen/view_html?pp=1&n=6&bs=1&zid=4752, 04.04.2018)

Herero and Nama resistance fighters: *“Every people and every tribe that feels its human rights to be oppressed to the utmost,”* said Bebel, *“has the right to rebel and the right to revolt.”*⁴

It is an idea re-encountering the right to self-defence expressed as early as in the writings of the European Enlightenment. It is not my intention to celebrate August Bebel as a pioneer of post-colonial theory. On the contrary. He was by no means untainted by the chauvinist colonial spirit of his age.⁵ However, I still think it is right and important to recall the critical and passionate words of August Bebel, for they show us that essentially what you and your peoples, Chief Kooper and Mrs. Chairman Muinjangué, have been fighting for over a 100 years could already have been achieved over a 100 years ago:

- our recognition of your struggle for freedom;
- our condemnation of the atrocities committed by German forces under the command of General Lothar von Trotha against your forebears;
- our plea for forgiveness;
- our joint pursuit of reconciliation and remembrance and
- our obligations regarding transitional justice, support and aid.

From the perspective of historical research today there is no doubt that the war of extermination in German South West Africa constituted a war crime and genocide. This conviction has also been reflected since 2015 in the policy guidelines of the German Federal Government. The violent imposition of German colonial rule cost the lives of about 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama. In all up to 100,000 people died; men, women and children; the German troops left most of them to die wretchedly by dehydration and starvation in the desert. The survivors were dispossessed, interned in camps, abused, raped and subjected to heavy forced labour. Many did not survive this brutal treatment. The consequences of the genocide are tangible and visible to this day. The descendants of the victims have largely remained landless. They are among the poorest of the poor in a country marked by major social disparities and where the descendants of the white German colonialists, settlers and soldiers still belong to the upper classes. The genocide is a trauma for society as a whole, one whose psychological, economic, social, cultural and political dimensions continue to have an effect 100 years later.

For decades in Germany we have repressed the atrocities of this war and its devastating consequences. We indulged in colonial nostalgia here well into the 1970s. That was followed by a colonial amnesia whose leaden weight has begun to lift more and more in recent years thanks to an increasingly vigorous involvement by civil society and academic

⁴ August Bebel zitiert nach: Heinz Karl: Vor 100 Jahren: Aufstand des Herero-Volkes gegen deutsche Kolonialherren, 2004 (http://archiv2007.sozialisten.de/politik/publikationen/kpf-mitteilungen/view_html?pp=1&n=6&bs=1&zid=4752, 04.04.2018)

⁵ Vgl. z.B. August Bebel: Rede vom 1. Dezember 1906, zitiert nach Deutsches Historisches Museum: Der Reichstag und die „Hottentottenwahl“ von 1907 (http://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/namibia/stadtpaziergang/pdf/10_reichstag.pdf, 04.04.2018)

research. But it took the commemoration of the *centenary of the Battle of Ohamakari*, better known as the *Battle of Waterberg*, for the then Development Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (SPD), during a visit to Namibia in August 2004, to recognise the atrocities of that time as *genocide* and to publicly apologise – the first German government official to do so.⁶ In 2015, the President of the Bundestag Norbert Lammert described the brutal suppression of the Herero and Nama resistance struggle once again as genocide.⁷ Germany's acceptance of its political and moral responsibility is now beyond doubt.

There are many questions concerning appropriate and adequate forms of apology, reconciliation, compensation and remembrance which still need to be answered in the future by our governments and our peoples. These are questions directed at our national governments. An important step has been taken with the coalition treaty for our new federal government which was negotiated by the Christian Democratic Union and the Socialdemocratic Party. I had the chance to chair the working group on Art, Culture, Media and Creative Industries. Part of our discussions was the policies and practices of our culture of remembrance. In this document for the first time, the parties agreed that we must deal with our colonial past as well as with the crimes of Nazi Germany and with the injustices of the GDR Government. This acknowledgement can change a lot. I want to underline the importance of this paragraph. From now on, the question of the colonial past is in the *core of our democratic consensus*. It is an invitation to join forces and to build up a common ground for a better future!

We have learnt in the past that it is feasible to find a common perspective that reaches beyond the necessary acknowledgement of past crimes and also embraces ideas and projects that shape and foster peaceful and fruitful cooperation yet to come. In order to achieve this perspective we also need participation from directly affected civil society and victims' associations. In Hamburg, we try to design a common process in that spirit.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, let me explain a little bit what role the City of Hamburg plays in all this. What can we contribute at a federal state level to solving this international conflict? A few weeks ago there was an international conference in Hamburg initiated by the research centre "Hamburg's (post-)colonial legacy/Hamburg and (early) globalization". In this context, Professor Zimmerer once more pointed to the "key role" Hamburg played in the Herero and Nama genocide. As you know, through its role as a port and mercantile city, Hamburg had long been one of the economic hubs of European colonial expansion. Thus it was merchants from Hamburg's Chamber of Commerce who in 1883 – you could say on the eve of the Berlin West Africa Conference (1884/85) – sent a memorandum to the Reichstag appealing for the establishment of German colonies in Africa. It was the Hamburg ship owner and later President of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, Adolph Woermann, who with his shipping company – the Woermann-Line – dominated the liner

⁶ Rede von Bundesministerin für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul bei den Gedenkfeierlichkeiten zum 100. Jahrestag der Herero-Aufstände, 14. August 2004 in Namibia, S. 2. (<http://www.baerfilm.de/PDF/RedeWieczorek-ZeulNamibia.pdf>, 04.04.2018)

⁷ Norbert Lammert, Deutsche ohne Gnade. In: Die Zeit, 09.07.2015.

traffic with Africa for decades. He later also ran the troop transports and supply lines to West Africa that led to the merciless suppression of the anti-colonial resistance and finally to the Herero and Nama genocide. – Later Prof Zimmerer will tell you more about what the research centre that he heads has so far managed to contribute towards researching the history of the Herero and Nama genocide. The two Namibian artists, Nicola Brandt and Vitjitua Ndjiharine, whose photographs and collages we can see here in the background, are part of an ongoing research project into German-Namibian colonial history.

Hamburg is facing up to its colonial past. Since the end of the 1990s, various civil society groups, especially the *Black communities* and *people of colour*, have worked tirelessly and creatively to generate public awareness of the topic. In 2014 the Senate finally resolved to reappraise its colonial legacy in order to develop appropriate forms of remembrance and historical-didactic communication. Much has happened since then. The establishment of the research centre at the University of Hamburg that I mentioned earlier creates the academic basis for city-wide discourse. The museums have addressed post-colonial issues in a variety of projects. Right now, we have three Benin Bronzes on display in the Museum for Arts and Crafts discussing their provenience and perspectives of restitution. In May the Ethnological Museum under Director Prof Plankensteiner, the Goethe Institute and the Foreign Ministry will continue this important process with a common workshop on provenience and restitution of colonial artefacts.

And we are also trying to deal with the muddled situation that has so far made it impossible for the Hamburg Museum of Medical History to repatriate quickly and with due dignity a skull discovered in its archives last spring which is clearly documented as being of Herero origin. Please believe me that neither the Museum of Medical History, nor Hamburg's Parliament and Senate consider a museum collection to be an appropriate place for *human remains* – and certainly not for those of someone who was possibly a victim of genocide. Human remains simply do not belong in any museum. They should be interred as is fitting by their descendants – such as you, Chief Kooper and Mrs. Chairman Muinjangué. We need to solve the legal matters which still prevent to happen what everyone so urgently and rightfully desires.

But it is not just science and museums which deal with our difficult legacy. The many colonial monuments in the city have come under scrutiny. – Yesterday you visited the building complex in the former Lettow-Vorbeck-Barracks in Hamburg's Jenfeld district where, as a first small step towards a critical reappraisal, a caption has finally been mounted on the so-called "Trotha House" that clearly identifies the colonial troop commander as a war criminal and responsible for the Herero and Nama genocide. This is part of what it says:

"Lothar von Trotha, a convinced supporter of a "race war" (...) (conducted) an extermination campaign in German South West Africa against the Herero and Nama, including against women and children. His 'order to shoot' of 2 October 1904 legitimised the genocide (1904-08). As a result, tens of thousands died in the desert, in battles, in

massacres or in the concentration camps. Since 2015 the Federal Government has also designated this genocide.”

My ministry is currently working flat out to develop a concept that will further put the Nazi-colonial monuments among these historical buildings into context.

In the ongoing process of post-colonial reappraisal, the participation of the civil society, and of *Black communities* and *people of colour* in particular, has high priority for us. We are aware that we cannot reappraise our shared history with its entangled legacies unless we do it together. To this end we have recommended the establishment of a *round table* to give active, hands-on impetus and support to the process of post-colonial engagement and remembrance.

Yes, Hamburg admits its political and moral responsibility for our shared colonial history. In the preamble of her latest constitution from 1952 the City of Hamburg commits herself to be an intermediary in the spirit of peace and understanding among all continents and peoples.⁸ In this spirit, I can only ask for your forgiveness for our city's participation in the suffering caused to your forebears and your peoples in the name of the German people, whose devastating consequences are still felt to this day.

We cannot undo what has been done. But we can achieve reconciliation through shared grief and shared remembrance. It is an honour for us that you have chosen to come to Hamburg for your Second Transnational Herero and Nama Congress, to continue and deepen the dialogue between our peoples. We are aware that history hurt and wounded your peoples. There are preconditions for a peaceful and united world, as Achille Mbembe writes:

“To create this world common to us all, we have to give back to those who in times gone by have experienced a process of abstraction and objectification that portion of humanity which has been taken from them.”⁹

I can assure you that Hamburg is urging the government of the Federal Republic of Germany to expand cooperation in partnership with your country at all levels – and this includes the level of civil society. We will contribute actively to achieving the vision of the African Union of an *“integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena”*.¹⁰ I am deeply convinced that we will only achieve this if we reappraise our history and the consequences of colonialism absolutely rigorously.

Let us work together for a united future in peace, dignity and justice.

⁸ „Sie will im Geiste des Friedens eine Mittlerin zwischen allen Erdteilen und Völkern der Welt sein.“

⁹ Achille Mbembe: Kritik der schwarzen Vernunft. Bonn 2016, S. 330-331.

¹⁰ African Union: Agenda 2063. (<https://au.int/agenda2063/about>, 04.04.2018)