

**Statement by the Herero/Mbanderu Genocide Committee in the USA in response to
Germany's proposed N\$160 million payment over a period of 10 years for the
reconciliation program, as reported in *The Namibian*, May 27, 2005**

The announcement of Germany's N\$160 million reconciliation fund, without consulting the Damara, Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and Nama, demonstrates a lack of respect and sensitivity to the victims of the (use years to identify, i.e. 1904-1908) genocide. The announcement came as a surprise, especially in the aftermath of the recent positive gestures by the German government on this issue.

No amount of money or development projects can erase the legacy of genocide. We are looking for justice. Germany alone committed the genocide against our people. However, Germany alone, cannot dictate the terms of settlement of this dispute, or define the monetary worth of our suffering. We want to engage in an open and genuine dialogue with the German government in order to reach a settlement of mutual understanding and reconciliation, as indicated in the 2004 Bundestag resolution, which calls upon the German federal government "to build and maintain specially (special? especially?) close and trusting relations with Namibia and its citizens."

In August of 2004, German Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul issued a statement on the anniversary of the 100-year commemoration of the genocide, expressing "regret" for the killings. The statement was seen as a positive step in the right direction, and was portrayed in various parts of the world, including Namibia, as an apology. In fact, the 2004 Bundestag resolution failed to offer an apology and to recognize the extermination of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu as genocide. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the minister's statement represented the initial step toward an unequivocal formal apology by the German Bundestag that would form the basis for genuine reconciliation.

Given this background, we are disappointed by the recent unilateral actions of the German government that seem to deviate from the principles laid out in Ms. Zeul's statement at Okakarara. Instead of building on this statement of regret and stepping up to its moral and historical responsibilities, the German government appears to have strayed down another path, one of semantics and divisive politics.

To date:

- Germany has failed to recognize the events of 1904–1908 as genocide, on the pretext that the convention against genocide was only established in 1948. Yet, many countries such as France, among others, have recognized the 1915 genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks.
- Germany has failed to engage in meaningful discussions with the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu people on how to resolve their rightful claims for an apology and reparations, while claiming to embrace reconciliation. The unilateral announcement of the reconciliation fund is a clear example of Germany's patronizing attitude.
- Germany's failure to have an open and transparent dialogue with representatives of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu, Nama and Damara people shows that the German government wants to control the process by handpicking the stakeholders and deciding who the representatives of our people ought to be.

We deplore these underhanded schemes to divide and weaken our resolve for a just and moral resolution of the genocide atrocities. The Namibian people have not forgotten that the politics of divide and conquer preceded the genocide and the plundering of property by the German Schutztruppe and we will not allow ourselves to be divided and manipulated a second time.

We welcome the participation of the Namibian government in its role as facilitator between the German government and the victims of genocide. The Namibian parliament should support our just cause by passing a resolution recognizing the genocide and calling for a formal apology and reparations from Germany. However, we believe that the victims must take a lead in negotiations with Germany because the resolution and restitution must be borne from the reconciliation of the German government and the victims

A moral, just and lasting resolution of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu genocide must be based on a genuine and meaningful apology from the German government. In order for true reconciliation between the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu people and Germany on this issue to take root, Germany must demonstrate an understanding of the loss and the socio-economic cultural destruction caused by the genocide, not only to the victims, but also to the entire Namibian society. Such an understanding would logically begin with actions to mitigate the legacy of the genocide on the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and other affected groups. Having accepted the moral responsibility for the crimes of genocide, Germany must take concrete actions to make amends by formally apologizing and paying reparations commensurate with the destruction and suffering caused by the crimes of genocide.

Finally, we want to reiterate that this issue cannot be resolved without recognition of the genocide and a formal apology from the German Bundestag. At this point in history, when it is seeking to join the United Nations Security Council, Germany needs to demonstrate to the world that it has the moral courage to do the right thing.

The Herero/Mblanderu Genocide Committee in the USA is primarily dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Genocide, supporting the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu claims for an apology and reparations from Germany, and keeping alive the memory of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu genocide for future generations.