



OvaHerero, Mbanderu and Nama Genocides Institute

## **Press Statement – September 19, 2017**

### **Delegation of 14 visit AMNH to view Namibian human remains**

Words cannot describe the feelings and emotions of Namibians living in the United States of America (USA) while viewing the remains of Namibians, who after they were killed during the wars of resistance against Imperial Germany were shipped and sold across continents. Some of the members of the Namibian delegation that went to view the remains were overcome with emotions especially at the thought that the remains could be those of their direct ancestors.

The delegation of 14 people living in the United States of America, including 12 victims and descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama genocides, and two friends and supporters of the cause of the Namibian people for restitution, visited the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) on Friday, September 15, to view the remains of eight Namibians in the custody of the museum in New York City, which were recently brought to their attention by Genocide and Restitution solidarity groups in the Federal Republic of Germany, especially Post Kolonial Berlin. The delegation included: Ms. Beth Lilac, Mrs. Kakuna Kerina, Ms. Meggy Muinjangué, Ms. Tjireja Lea Kandjii, Ms. Masukoo Kandjii, Mr. Uatezeua Kanguotui, Mr. Tjapaa Katuemetima, Ms. Mekahako Komomungondo, Mr. Kamanene Michael Mupya, Mr. Sagaria Maharero, Mr. Robert Murtfeld, Dr. Kavemuii Murangi, Mrs. Maandero Nguaike Kazarako, Mr. Jephta Nguherimo.

The delegation had a positive and constructive first engagement with representatives of the museum. As direct descendants of the victims, and thus victims themselves and stakeholders, they informed the museum staff that there are other stakeholders besides the delegation of 14, whom they have equally informed of the discovery of the remains, including Namibian Embassy in the United States of America and the Namibian Ministry of Basic Education, Arts, Sport and Culture.

Museum staff were willing to listen and learn about the genocides through the harrowing tales of the genocide descendants—each personal and close to them as orally narrated to them by elder generations over the years. These tales were about harrowing and horrific experiences which their families endured during times of brutality under Imperial Germany's occupation of their land, then referred to, mostly by Imperial Germany, and her allies, as Deutsche Sudwest Afrika, German South West Africa, today's Namibia.



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The delegation informed the museum staff that their goal is for these remains to be returned to the affected Namibian communities, who were nearly annihilated as per the extermination orders by then Imperial Germany's army commander in the colonized territory, General Lothar von Trotha, against the Ovaherero and Nama issued in 1904 and 1905 respectively. Once so returned to the rightful Namibian people, the remains shall then be placed in a dignified and suitable final place, such as a museum dedicated to these genocides, for example. The museum authority expressed its willingness to work with the delegation and the affected communities to make this possible in a timely manner.

The museum was receptive to the request of the delegation that the remains of Namibians be separated from the rest of the collections, and placed in a suitable and respectful environment until they can be returned to the rightful descendants. The museum staff reassured the delegation that to the best of their knowledge the remains have been in the museum since 1924 untouched, and that no research will be conducted without the explicit approval and direction of the affected communities and only for the purposes of returning these to the Namibian people.

To honor these individuals whose remains have been at the museum for 93 years, the delegation asked the museum staff to provide a space that will highlight the 1904-1908 genocides. The museum expressed willingness to explore such a possibility including a digital online genocide exhibition. The delegation left very pleased and will facilitate further discussion to move forward.

To help further manage and direct the process, the delegation proposed setting up a technical committee that will comprise all stakeholders including affected communities and the Namibian government to discuss how to proceed with the remains. The museum staff expressed their willingness to do whatever the technical committee come up with be it repatriation of the bones or any research the stakeholders wish to conduct on the remains. It was a very emotional discussion but the delegation was pleased with the genuine desire of the museum staff to help heal the wounds of the descendants. We hope the German government and museums will learn from the Americans how to approach such a sensitive dialogue with dignity and respect.

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