

Herrero and Nama genocide finally recognized by Germany

Via [CADTM](#)

What was the first genocide of the 20th century is finally acknowledged. On May 28, Germany acknowledged for the first time that it committed genocide against the Herero and Nama populations in Namibia during the colonial era.

This is the result of a determined mobilization of the victims' descendants who have been fighting for decades.

"We will now officially call these events for what they are from today's perspective: genocide," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in a statement.

"In light of Germany's historical and moral responsibility, we will ask Namibia and the descendants of the victims to forgive us" for the "atrocities" committed, the minister continued. In a "gesture of recognition of the immense suffering imposed on the victims," the European country will support "reconstruction and development" in Namibia with a financial program worth 1.1 billion euros, he added.

"Germany's acceptance that a genocide was committed is a first step in the right direction," said Alfredo Hengari, spokesman for Namibian President Hage Geingob.

In the late 19th century, German invaders seized the land and cattle of the Nama people, who led a pastoral life. The Herero and Nama populations lived in the southwestern part of the African continent, which has since become Namibia. As part of the expansion of German colonization led by Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm I's then-chancellor Germany took over this territory in 1884 and colonized it.

An extermination to create "a white territory"

Twenty years later, in 1904, Herero warriors, supported by their Nama neighbors, rose up and killed German settlers. In June 1904, General Lothar Von Trotha, appointed commander-in-chief of troops in the German colony of Southwest Africa, landed in Reich possession with a mission to put down the Herero and Nama uprising.

Von Trotha was already known for his methods of colonial repression in China and German East Africa (Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda). The war he had to fight, under the orders of Kaiser Wilhelm II, was fierce. He planned the extermination of both peoples to create a "white" territory.

Extermination of the rebellion

The Herero tribes today represent about 7% of the Namibian population compared to 40% at the beginning of the 20th century.

In total, at least 60,000 Herero and about 10,000 Nama lost their lives between 1904 and 1908. The German colonial forces had employed genocidal techniques: mass murder, exile into the desert where thousands of men, women, and children died of thirst, and concentration camps such as the notorious Shark Island.

The bones, especially the skulls of the victims, were sent to Germany for racial scientific experiments. The physician Eugen Fischer, who worked on Shark Island and whose writings influenced Adolf Hitler, sought to prove the "superiority of the white race."

Limited Reparations

The head of German diplomacy specifies that this is not compensation on a legal basis, and that this recognition does not pave the way for any "legal claim for compensation." This

sum will be paid over a period of thirty years, according to sources close to the negotiations, and should primarily benefit the descendants of these two populations.

“We cannot draw a line under the past. The acknowledgement of the fault and the request for forgiveness are, however, an important step towards overcoming the past and building the future together,” said the head of German diplomacy.

In a desire for reconciliation, Germany had in 2019 handed over to Namibia the remains of the exterminated Herero and Nama tribal members, and the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Michelle Müntefering, had then asked for “forgiveness from the bottom of my heart.”

This gesture was clearly considered insufficient by the descendants and the Namibian authorities, who demanded an official apology and reparations. Germany has repeatedly opposed this, quoting the millions of euros in development aid it has given Namibia since its independence in 1990.

While Germany’s memory work on the Nazi period is generally considered exemplary, work on the colonial period in Africa from the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries has long been neglected.

The recognition of the first genocide of the 20th century represents a step forward and a victory. Also in Germany, the Parliament (Bundestag) had recognized the Armenian Genocide in May 2016, thus opposing the denialism of the Turkish state, which was pushing to prevent this recognition. Moreover, Angela Merkel considers the parliament’s resolution non-binding and therefore did not take the formal step of this recognition.

Germany’s recognition comes shortly after Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Rwanda, during which he acknowledged French responsibilities in the 1994 Tutsi genocide, but did not make an official apology on behalf of France. So this is a step

forward, but we are far from justice, especially with regard to the French state officials (Mitterrand, Hubert Védrine, Alain Juppé and others) who conducted this secret policy on behalf of the country.

The struggle continues here for truth and justice, against the impunity of the accomplices of a genocide that killed one million people in three months.