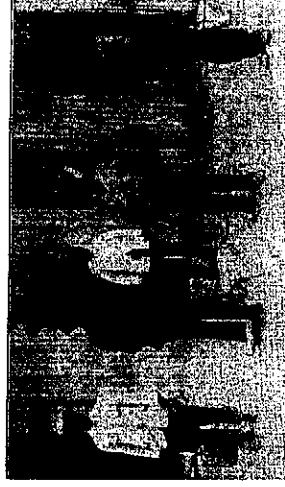
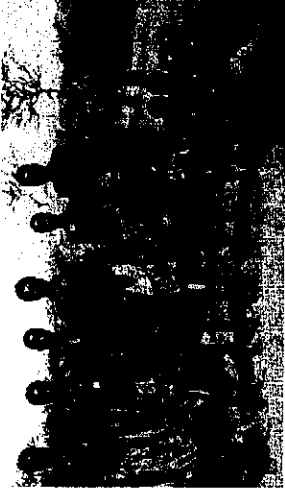


# Remembering genocide



Images of a holocaust: in the centre German officers pack skulls for transport to Germany

**Namibia has no memorial to the victims of the 1904-07 genocide. Elvis Muraranganda spoke to various leaders about how the genocide should be memorialised**

Just over 100 years after thousands of Namibians were butchered, executed, worked to death, herded into death camps to die of illness and starvation, or forced into the desert to face a similar fate, there is still no memorial to this tragic period in the country's history.

With hundreds of skulls of genocide victims that were taken to Germany for 'scientific' investigation about to be repatriated at the request of Namibian authorities the issue of genocide commemoration is back on the political front-burner. At the same time there is increased discussion as to why there is no formal memorial or museum dealing with the genocide. There has been speculation that government intends to build a genocide museum at Okahandja although it appears no official decision has been taken on this.

It is unclear what will happen to the skulls once they are returned. Many feel they should be buried during a formal ceremony and according to traditional customs, while others believe they should be kept, possibly at a genocide museum, and used as evidence in a future reparations claim against the German government.

National Museum official Eugene Marais confirmed that there have been talks about a genocide museum "within certain circles". He however said nothing in writing had reached his office. Marais warned that exhibiting human remains would raise ethical problems. "If the skulls are exhibited in a museum for political gain, the Namibian people will be committing the same mistakes as those they repatriated the skulls from. We support the burial of these remains."

Marais emphasised that the decision as

what to do with the skulls lies entirely with the traditional authorities affected. A special storeroom has been identified at the National Museum where the remains will be temporarily kept upon their return. "Access to skulls will be limited to the genocide committees, representatives of the different affected traditional authorities and those whose ancestors these remains belong to. It will not be open for the public".

**Professor Peter Katjavivi, government representative on genocide matters**

We need a genocide and memorial centre where the future generations can learn about what happened during that time. The reason why we don't have such a centre yet is because such things take time and it doesn't happen overnight. We need to engage all stakeholder. We have take into account different cultural requirements in deciding what to do with the skulls. It is left up to the different ethnic groups involved to decide whether to bury or store the skulls at mutually agreed place once returned from Germany.

**Hon Chief Justus Garoeb, UDF**

Many people were killed during that genocide. It was not only the Hereros and Namas but also the Damaras. The Namibian government should negotiate with the German government to have those affected by the genocide compensated. The day when the two governments reach a consensus should be declared a national holiday. The skulls should be brought back to Namibia with the scientific findings and information on them. They should be kept at the National Museum of Namibia. A genocide museum is also a nice idea and information on the genocide can be collected and stored in this museum.

**Usutuaije Maamberua, Swanu**

We have already asked for the genocide day to be declared a national holiday. This day should not only be remembered as a day but we need a genocide remembrance monument

to be erected. At this monument visitors can learn about the genocide and it will not be forgotten. Future generations will be reminded of what happened in 1904 and they will not think about a having another genocide. It is not a question of whether to bury or exhibit the skulls in a museum but the critical question is what will come with the skulls. We need the information on those skulls. We need to know who those skulls belonged to, from which region they were and any other information pertaining to the identification of the skulls.

**Kela Hamutenya, RDP**

Remembrance of the genocide has to start with reconciliation between the Hereros and the Germans. The victims will be healed through dialogue. This genocide should be used to unite all parties concerned. It should never be used to victimise people for what happened. The choice on what to do with the skulls is left with the families or groups of the deceased. Parties concerned need to come together and acknowledge what was done. The Germans have already apologised but more dialogue between stakeholders is needed. It will be fair that all ethnic groups are allowed to have a stake in the history of this country. As an Ovambo young man, I know that sometimes we overlook the historical roles which other tribes played in the history of this country. A genocide museum would be fair.

**Utjua Muinyangue, Ovaharero Reparation Committee**

This period has to be remembered and commemorated in the correct way. Many people were killed during these times. It is a painful event that should be remembered at a national level as a public holiday. The skulls need to be returned back to Namibia and the ethnic groups will decide on what to do with the skulls. We need a place to remember what happened that day and for the future generations to learn about what happened in the past. ■