

Shame on Germany

WHAT civilised nation would keep 'trophies' of human skulls of people massacred during a bloody reign of terror without a sense of shame and still have the audacity to term these human remains "a cultural collection" – whose culture anyway?

Such is German insensitivity and arrogance on what has been one of the darkest pages in our history. The Germans have proven notoriety. Their history says a lot about their brutality and lack of feelings for fellow human beings from their first genocide against the Ovaherero and Nama people to Hitler's wars of aggression and the holocaust.

German public broadcaster, ARD (consortium of public law broadcasting institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany), this week made it known that 47 (fourty seven) skulls {remains of the colonial-era Herero massacre} are still stored at the Medical History Museum at the Charite teaching hospital in Berlin and another dozen or so, at Freiburg University in southwestern Germany.

The skulls are part of 300 or more that were taken to Germany after the 1904-7 German extermination wars against the Ovaherero and Nama people ostensibly for scientific research aimed at proving the racial superiority of whites over blacks.

Suffice to say it is more than 100 years since the so-called scientific research. These German universities should have the guts to reveal their findings and explain why they are still keeping these skulls if it is not for the same racist reasons for which they decapitated Ovaherero and Nama corpses in the first place.

Over the years, Germany has reluctantly refused to accept responsibility for the 1904-7 Ovaherero-Nama genocide and therefore reparations despite overwhelming evidence of their brutal killings of these groups and in terms of the extermination order issued by General Lothar von Trotha, under the command of Kaiser Wilhelm II, against the Ovaherero people.

But it paid reparations to Jews for the holocaust executed by its brutal fascist forces.

The present German government hides behind generational differences and yet they are too happy to keep human skulls of the Ovaherero people like animals in a zoo. It makes no sense at all for the German government to disown past atrocities against the Ovaherero and Nama people while keeping their skulls. If anything, there is a convergence here.

To add insult to injury, when confronted about the skulls of Ovaherero people at German universities and the plea by Dr Peter Katjavivi for the skulls to be turned over to Namibia, a German government spokesperson said Germany has not received a formal request in this regard.

For God's sake, why should Germany wait for a formal request from Namibia? Why not turn over the human remains out of shame and embarrassment if they have no civility and compassion. In the first place, Germany knows where these human remains came from. They also know whose remains they are and the circumstances under which they got to their country. So why wait?

One of the Nama chiefs, David Frederick, has for many years now been asking the Germans to return the skull of Chief Cornelius Frederick who fell in battle with the Germans during their colonial terror campaign. He is still to get restoration of the remains of his father, let alone an answer from Berlin.

Germany owes Namibians and the entire humanity an explanation about these skulls. The Germans not only have to explain the entire episode but must be ashamed of themselves and forthwith tender these human remains to Namibia for a dignified burial.

No civilised nation would, in this century, show such barbarity and insensitivity towards a people that have suffered so much for what is rightfully theirs. The Ovaherero and Nama people deserve to be afforded the remains of their people for dignified burial without delay.

Traditionally, we regard human remains as sacred and common sense and humility dictates these mortal remains should not serve as a tool for any hare-brained scientific undertaking. Under no circumstance whatsoever can anybody preserve human remains. Those who claim to be Christians should never become satanic.

The skulls of these Namibian martyrs deserve restoration to God and home soil. Germany must therefore do the honourable thing (that is if the Germans still have honour) – deliver the skulls.