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Hereros plan 'tsunami' against Germany

By: BRIGITTE WEIDLICH at OKAHANDJA

THE Herero community has once again repeated its demand for reparations and dialogue with the German government regarding the atrocities committed against Herero and Nama-speaking people during the 1904-08 uprising.

Yesterday the tone sharpened considerably as speakers at the 85th annual Herero Day at Okahandja expressed their impatience with the fact that that no progress had been made with the dialogue that Herero leaders had requested four years ago, when the 100th anniversary of the start of the Herero uprising was commemorated and a German Cabinet Minister rendered an apology at Ohamakari. Deputy Local and Regional Minister Kazenambo Kazenambo yesterday even spoke of a "tsunami" that could not be stopped.

"We call on the German government to read the mood - it is not the Herero community alone, they have been joined by the Nama people and how that tsunami could be stopped, I don't know," the Deputy Minister stated.

The debate received new impetus a few weeks ago, when Professor Peter Katjavivi demanded that the skulls of Herero and Nama prisoners of the 1904-08 uprising, which were taken to Germany for scientific research to "prove" the superiority of Europeans over Africans, be returned to Namibia.

Katjavivi was Namibia's ambassador to Germany until recently and has in the meantime been appointed as Director General of the

National Planning Commission.

Katjavivi was reacting to a German television documentary, which reported that its investigators had found over 40 of these skulls at two German universities, among them probably the skull of a Nama chief who had died on Shark Island near Luederitz.

"We demand these skulls back in order to bury them in dignity," Esther Muinjangue, Chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee (OGC), said yesterday.

"That scientific research must surely be concluded by now and the results made known."

Muinjangue added that it was not necessary to wait for the Namibian Government to officially request Germany to return the skulls, as was stated by officials of the German embassy in Windhoek.

"These skulls did not belong to Germany when they were sent to Germany a century ago.

Whom did they ask for permission then? If Germany cannot return them without that request from the Namibian Government, we take it as an open challenge and invitation for our Government to do so," Muinjangue demanded.

"We shall continue to demand reparations from Germany even if it should take us another 100 years or more," she added.

"The German government and parliament should not take this issue lightly, because if the Hereros and Namas are pushed to their limits like in 1904, this could deal a serious blow to the otherwise good relations existing between the two countries," the OGC Chairperson cautioned.

"Similarly, our demand for dialogue with all stakeholders [on

the 1904 atrocities] is not asking for the impossible or something unreasonable."

Chief Alfons Maharero also called on the Namibian Government to officially request the return of the skulls from Germany.

"The healing process between the affected Namibians and the German government will not be complete without them [the skulls] resting in eternal peace," he said.

Chief Maharero announced that he and a delegation of chiefs would travel to Germany soon.

"We intend to sensitise the Berlin government about our seriousness for a meaningful dialogue with a clear purpose of ensuring a process of restorative justice, healing and lasting reconciliation," Chief Maharero emphasised.

"No lasting reconciliation is possible without meaningful dialogue, and we will continue to sensitise both governments of this unfinished business."

Herero Chief Kuaima Riruako did not touch on any political issues in his short speech yesterday and merely reminded all Herero speakers to seek unity and avoid division.

The streets of Okahandja once again came alive with troops parading the streets and the Herero cavalry showing off their riding skills during the procession to the ancestral graves of Herero and Ovambanderu chiefs.

Colourful displays of the various flags, uniforms and dresses of the red, green, and white commandos could be seen while chilling and ear-piercing battle cries were heard at the regular meeting place afterwards.

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