

New Era

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Germany ready to repatriate skulls Desie Heita

WINDHOEK The German government is ready to repatriate the skulls of Namibians stored in German museums, and even contribute to the repatriation transportation costs.

However, the Namibian Government is yet to inform Germany of where to repatriate the skulls, the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Dirk Niebel, informed the media on Thursday last week.

"We have not received clear directives from the Namibian Government, and it seems Government has not decided on what to do with the skulls, whether they would bury them or put them in the museum. We are waiting for the wishes of the Namibian Government," said Niebel.

Niebel, who took office in November 2009, undertook his first visit to Namibia last week. It was his second visit to Africa since taking office.

"Up to now, we do not know whether the skulls will be kept in a museum or buried upon their return, but the German government is ready to transport the skulls to Namibia," he said.

The skulls belong to Nama and Herero victims of the uprising against German colonial rule between 1904 and 1908.

The German government indicated last year that it is willing to return the human skulls kept in German museums since the colonial era.

Nama and Herero chiefs have decided not to bury the remains of their forefathers who were killed during the two tribes' uprising against the German colonial forces in 1904-08.

The chiefs and their people have decided that the remains should be put in a museum and not buried at the Heroes Acre or any other place.

The decision was revealed during the signing of a joint document in October 2009, which contained the chiefs' decision concerning the issue of the skulls.

The document was handed to the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture for submission to Cabinet.

"Our history cannot be buried, they were beheaded in public, and thus we have to retain them in public," were the sentiments of Chief Kuaima Riruako of the Herero Traditional Authority at the signing ceremony.

The two tribes had specifically said they wanted the skulls returned on May 28, 2010 because it is on this date in 1908 that prisoners who were kept in concentration camps by the German forces were released.

"This will signify the freedom and liberation of our deceased ones," Utjiua Muinjangué, a member of the technical committee, assisting the chiefs had earlier said.

Moreover, the chiefs want the remains to be accompanied by all the relevant information, such as how many Namas, Hereros, children, adults, their ages, males and females were taken.

A German scientist, Eugen Fischer, had requested the skulls of the dead for research to support his theory of the superiority of European brains over those of Africans and the chiefs want findings if any in this regard to be released as well.