

New Era

30.06.2009

Nama, Ovaherero Chiefs to Meet Over Skulls - by Irene Hoaes

WINDHOEK - Nama and Ovaherero chiefs will hold a two-day meeting on August 2 2009 in Mariental to determine the way forward on Namibian skulls in Germany once they are repatriated back to Namibia.

Member of Parliament Ida Hoffman, who is representing the Nama chiefs, said the meeting will be held in Mariental because of its convenience for Ovaherero chiefs who will travel from their regions.

The skulls are those of indigenous Ovaherero and Nama victims of the uprising against German colonial rule between 1904 and 1908.

Thousands of indigenous people perished as a result of an extermination order by the chief of the German colonial armed forces or Schutztruppe, General Lothar von Trotha.

The German scientist Eugen Fischer had requested skulls of the dead for research to support his theory of the superiority of the European brain over that of Africans.

Relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture and the National Museum, were instructed by Cabinet to start preparing for the repatriation of the skulls.

The authorities are, however, awaiting a decision by the different Nama and Ovaherero chiefs before the skulls can be repatriated.

The chiefs have to decide whether they want to perform some rituals or just bury the human remains or give them to the museum for display.

Hoffman said the chiefs must decide on what to do with the remains, whether bury them or keep them in a museum.

"If kept in a museum, the new generation can learn about our history," Hoffman said. Hoffman said the meeting will be a reconciliatory type of meeting for the chiefs.

"We must make peace among ourselves when we receive the remains. We still have to say thank you when we receive the remains of our forefathers," she added.

She noted that there is a possibility that some Baster groups and San chiefs will be present at the envisaged meeting in the south.

A possibility is there too that Damara chiefs will be present, although this is yet to be confirmed.

"There is a lot surrounding this issue, everybody has their own idea," said Chief Daniel Fredriks of the !Aman Traditional Authority at Bethanie.

Fredriks said the feeling of his subjects is to get the remains of their late chief, Cornelius Fredriks,

and bury it at Bethanie.

He is, however, not sure about the feelings of the other Nama tribes, although he noted that most people are not keen on keeping the remains in a museum.

Fredriks said a workshop is scheduled for the Nama chiefs on July 22, where feelings of the rest of the Nama tribes will be gauged.

In an earlier interview with New Era, Chief Kuaima Riruako said the skulls that are held in a German museum must be accompanied by "body history" $\hat{\sim}$, $\hat{\sim}$, the purpose of the research and findings of the research when they arrive on Namibian soil.