

New Era

Namibia Wants Skulls Returned

BERLIN – Former Namibian ambassador to Berlin and current Director General of the National Planning Commission, Dr Peter Katjavivi, has demanded that German universities return dozens of human skulls – remains of the colonial-era Herero massacre that are held in their archives.

Public broadcaster ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlichen und unabhängigen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) reported late on Monday that the skulls were spirited away to Germany in the years after the 1904 killings for "scientific research"

aimed at proving the racial superiority of whites to blacks.

It said 47 skulls are still stored at the Medical History Museum at the Charite teaching hospital in Berlin and at least a dozen more at Freiburg University in southwestern Germany.

"According to a UNESCO convention, these things must be repatriated to their country of origin," Katjavivi told ARD.

"We have institutions in Namibia that would be prepared to undertake that important assignment."

Katjavivi said the re-

mains were deeply important to Namibians.

"It is a question of regaining our dignity, it is a question of regaining our history. And it is a question of finally bringing those skulls to have a proper burial," he said.

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Dr. Katjavivi

moment, there has been no official request that we have received from the Namibian authorities. The Herero people began an uprising against the German colonial rulers in January 1904 with warriors – incensed by German settlers stealing their land, cattle and women – massacring about 200 German civilians over several days.

The German colonial rulers responded ruthlessly, defeating the Herero in a decisive battle northeast of Windhoek later that year.

It was followed by the notorious "extermination order" of General Lothar von Trotha, who was under the direct command of Kaiser Wilhelm II in Berlin.

The figures for the total Herero population alive at the time ranged from 50 000 to 80 000.

It is estimated that tens of thousands were butchered, with only some 15 000 surviving after the campaign ended in 1907. Many historians called the killings the first genocide of the 20th century. Overseas Development Minister, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, expressed Germany's regret in 2004 for the Herero deaths during an event marking the centenary of the massacre. – *Nampya* AFP

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"We are not emotional. We are just saying the facts are there. What is now a challenge to Germany and Namibia is to approach those issues as calmly as possible to ensure we do the right thing at the right time."

ARD reporter, Markus Frenzel, said there might be more Herero remains lurking in German archives.

"It is believed that a total of at least 300 Herero skulls were taken to Germany in the early 20th century," Frenzel told AFP. University archivists did not deny the finds when asked by ARD.

"It is a cultural collection," Freiburg archive director Dieter Speck said.

Katjavivi said he aimed to resolve the issue amicably.

"I hope the institutions will cooperate with us. We want to do these things as friends. I am sure Germany would do the same if they had some of their things taken during a particular period," he said. A foreign ministry spokeswoman on Tuesday declined to comment on the case, saying "for the