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Meeting on skulls postponed – by Irene Hoaes

WINDHOEK - A meeting between Nama and Ovaherero traditional leaders that was supposed to take place in Windhoek this weekend has been postponed, as not all of them were ready.

According to Chief David Fredriks of the !Aman Traditional Authority in Bethanie, he could only get hold of three chiefs, as the others were not ready to attend.

The meeting was supposed to discuss how to deal with the human skulls that are presently being kept in a German museum, once they are returned to Namibia.

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

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

Fredriks said the Nama chiefs have no consensus yet on how they want to deal with the issue and could not meet with the Ovaherero chiefs until they have come to an agreement.

He said it might take another week before they can attend the meeting scheduled for Windhoek. Eleven Nama chiefs are expected to attend.

The same meeting was earlier scheduled for Mariental on August 2, 2009 but did not take place.

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 the decision of the different Nama and Ovaherero chiefs before the skulls can be repatriated.

The chiefs have to decide how the matter will be handled, as well as whether they want to perform some rituals or just bury the human remains, or give them to the museum for display.

In an earlier interview with New Era newspaper, Chief Kuaima Riruako said the skulls that are held in a German museum must be accompanied by 'body history', the purpose of the research and findings of the research before they arrive on Namibian soil.

Patron of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee, Festus Muundjua said the meeting would take place as soon as the Nama chiefs are ready.

German scientist Eugen Fischer requested skulls of the dead for research to support his theory of the superiority of the European brain over that of an African during the occupation of South West Africa.

