



OVAHERERO TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

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29 May 2024

PRESS STATEMENT

GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY

Background

The history of the events leading to the first genocide of the twentieth century is well-known and well documented in the annals of historical material.

It is equally widely known and accepted that genocide is derived from the Greek word “genos”, meaning tribe or race. The Latin word “cide” means the act of killing. In simple terms, the genocide is the planned and organized killing of a group of people because of their race, religion, ethnicity or nationality. In this context the detractors should not confused the genocides committed against the Ovaherero and Nama people with an imaginable genocide committed against Namibians as a nation, which does not exist! The genocides in the present-day Namibia were committed against the Ovaherero ethnic group of Ehi rOvaherero (Hereroland) and equally the Nama ethnic group of Great Namaqualand.

The day on which the Extermination Order was issued against the Ovaherero people was 2 October 1904. It is the day whose consequences we suffer today. It is the day that the Ovaherero people have memorialized over the past 20 years. It is the day of historical significance for the Ovaherero people as it was the day that signaled an existential threat which was eventually carried out, resulting in the wiping out of over 80% of our population. Because of the importance of this day, the Chief’s Council of the Ovaherero Traditional Authority in its meeting at Okahandja on 12 April 2024, through a resolution, reaffirmed this day to be the day that Ovaherero people will commemorate as they have done so over the past 20 years. The Chief’s Council further reiterated that it has no objection to other such days being proclaimed for reasons advanced by communities that were affected by genocide. The Christian holidays are more than one, nobody makes a fuss about that!

It is clear from the above narrative that the Ovaherero Tradition Authority cannot regard the 28th of May as a genocide Remembrance Day, let alone “National Genocide Remembrance Day”. At best it can be described as the day that the slave trade of the Ovaherero and Nama people started. Those who were purportedly free were not even aware of this so-called freedom as this was merely done for propaganda purposes for the international community’s consumption. We are surely not zombies to be free into the hands of colonial masters.

It is against this background that the Ovaherero Traditional Authority rejects the proposed “National Genocide Remembrance Day” for the following reasons:

Firstly, the 28th of May was the day that introduced the Ovaherero people into slavery. Remember that there were no pre-arranged repatriation plans for the surviving inmates to be taken to their erstwhile place of residence, as these were already destroyed by the German colonizers, and expropriated through formal proclamations. Even if there were such plans, the surviving inmates would have no where to go.

Their land and livestock were occupied by the Germans and other white settlers, and we were not permitted to own livestock until 1915! Therefore, releasing the Ovaherero people into slavery and languishing in abject poverty has no historical significance to be commemorated.

Secondly, the 28th of May merely signaled the beginning of the German subjugation to inhuman treatment which included the following:

- A) They had no land to return to as their fertile land was confiscated by the German settlers and other whites; what's there to celebrate or memorialize?
- B) They had no families to go back to as most of them either perished at the hand of General Von Trotha or forced to leave the country as the "**Big Gun**" was pursuing them into the Kalahari Desert. The Extermination Order was very clear as to what would happen to anyone disobeying that Order. What is there to memorialize or celebrate? Slavery? Subjugation? Dehumanization or what?
- C) They had no livestock to live on as all their livestock were confiscated by the blood thirsty Germans and other whites of similar intents. Please tell us what is there to memorialize? Impoverishment? Slavery? It is unfortunate that some descendants of the victim communities are in cahoots with the narrative to destroy and erase from memory the suffering of our people which continues till today!!
- D) In fact, the **Death Camps** were not closed, it was a mere propaganda campaign. The Death camps were swelled with those prisoners who has been ordered by General von Trotha to be put into death camps. They remained into captivity and not released as free people. Their hardships continued: i.e., women and girls continued to be raped, beatings continued, prisoners continued to be exposed to the extreme cold weather of the South Atlantic, human parts were experimented on and from these **Death Camps** prisoners were sold as slave laborers to farmers and to private companies. These were the slaves that were used to build the railway line between Luderitz and Keetmanshoop for not salary whatsoever. The most recent study on forensic architecture, using a ground penetrating radar, discovered mass graves along side that railway line and elsewhere. Tell us what is there to celebrate? Death and destruction? Continued genocide by way making Shark Island a tourist destination or building the Independence Museum on the concentration camp?

The 28th of May is clearly not a date that the Ovaherero people can memorialize as it has brought them nothing but misery. The 28th of May is simply a perpetuation of the denialist efforts of the ruling elite to falsify the heroic resistance of the Ovaherero and Nama people in the history of now what is called Namibia.

We, as the Ovaherero people who were victims of genocide as per the definition in International Law, shall memorialize the 2nd of October 1904 as the Ovaherero Genocide Remembrance Day, which is the day that the occupying German administration issued the Extermination Order against our people. Equally, the Nama genocide is a distinct historical event requiring its full recognition and as such be recognized as the Nama Genocide Remembrance Day.

Let it be known that the Ovaherero Traditional Authority is aware that the narrative that has been floating around and is being firmed up is that one of making the Ovaherero Genocide as a national genocide to fit the narrative of the Joint Declaration between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Namibia Government. We are aware that behind closed doors, Government is continuing to impose the JD on the victim communities the same way that this day is being imposed on us.

We call on all Ovaherero and the rest of Namibians, Batswana, South Africans and Angolans to join us as we shall memorialize the 2nd of October as the Ovaherero Genocide Remembrance Day !!!

(Signed)

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