

Open Letter to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)
Follow-up Conversation
Berlin, Germany
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Good afternoon. On September 21st, 2021, I penned an Open Letter to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD, in which I made a case for why it was critically important for EKD to reject the Joint Declaration reached between the German and the Namibian governments.

On December 9th, 2021, I received the following response from the Head of Africa and Development Policy Department. "We as German church cannot interfere in this Namibian decision making. Even less can we as a church in Germany prescribe to the Namibian government whom it wants to include on its side in possible further negotiations."

Today, I find myself in Berlin, the seat of the German government. The place where the Berlin Conference of 1884 took place. The citadel where the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples was carefully planned by Kaiser Wilhelm II and carried out with surgical precision by Lieutenant-General Adrian Lothar von Trotha from 1904-1908.

I am here for a dialogue with you, my German brothers, and sisters. To share with you how deep the wound of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples is, and why it will never heal, if the German government continuously picks on its scab. We are traumatized. We have not been afforded healing space. This wound was once again reopened recently. On September 9, 2022, a cable company discovered an arms cache of over 1,000 guns and artillery pieces belonging to the *schutztruppe* in Tsumeb, Namibia, as it was laying its underground cable.

My maternal and paternal great-great-parents were brutally silenced by the German killing machine. They were denied the ability to speak about their dignity of self-worth. Their silence has served as an unmistakable clarion call to action to generations yet unborn to speak truth to power in the face of injustice. Although they are long gone, buried in unmarked graves, they are speaking through us, their descendants. My great-great-parents who were the victims of sexual assault by German settlers and soldiers are the amber that started the fire in me on the meaning of *Otjitiro Otjindjandja*.

As stipulated in my open letter, the reasons the descendants of the Ovaherero and the Nama genocide view the so-called joint declaration as heralding the second genocide are stipulated below:

- 81 percent (65,000) of the Ovaherero, and 50 percent (10,000) of the Nama people were murdered by the Schutztruppe. This included the banishment of Ovaherero and Nama peoples to Botswana, Cameroon, and South Africa.
- The Ovaherero and Nama population would be almost 2 million people today had it not been for the genocide that Germany carried out against them.
- Over a quarter of, **Ehi ro Ovaherero** and **Aboxan !Hub**, Ovaherero and Nama lands, originally over 50,000 square miles, and countless cattle were seized without compensation by German colonists-with the explicit consent of the German colonial authorities.

- Today the original land of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples is still in the hands of the German great-great-grandchildren of those who stole it.
- We were not given a voice at the Berlin Conference of 1884 where European countries divided and claimed the African continent for themselves. Otto von Bismarck claimed Namibia for Die Vaterland, Deutschland, with the complete acquiescence of the German Lutheran Church, Roman Catholic Church, and the Finnish Lutheran Church. The silence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Finnish Lutheran Church at the time meant complicity.
- Fast forward. The same playbook was used in 2021, when the German government alone, as the guilty party, decided that the killing of the Ovaherero, and Nama peoples and the stolen land is worth 1.1 billion euros to be paid out over a period of 30 years.
- Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) headed by the late Paramount Chief, Advocate Vekuii Rukoro, and Gaob Johannes Isaack of the Nama Traditional Leaders' Association (NTLA) were deliberately excluded from participating in the negotiation between the governments of Namibia and Germany in clear contravention of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007, ushering in a blatant connivance of the two governments. **OTA represents 95% of the Ovaherero people, including those in the diaspora. NTLA represents 100% of the Nama people.**
- Here is how EKD pronounced itself on the process of these faulty negotiations. "EKD expressly welcomes the path of negotiations embarked upon by the Namibian and German governments and requests that the process be continued".
- Well, this process that EKD enthusiastically endorsed has resulted in Germany dictating to Namibia that it will pay 1.3 billion dollars over 30 years. This equates to 43,333,333 million dollars a year. This begs the question. Is the loss of life of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples; loss of culture; and the loss of land worth what Germany is offering?

The following excerpt is taken from the Evangelische Kirche In Deutschland, EKD, statement, under the heading. "Forgive us our sins" issued on April, 24th, 2017.

1. "With a confession of guilt and the request for forgiveness the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has turned to the descendants of the victims of what most historians refer to as the first genocide of the 20th century. As the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and successor organization of the former Prussian Evangelical High Church Council (*Oberkirchenrat*), we expressly confess our guilt today towards the entire Namibian people and before God," says the statement released under the heading "Forgive us our sins (Matthew 6:12)".
2. There is a serious omission in this lame EKD apology. The Ovaherero and Nama peoples were specifically mentioned by name and targeted by the extermination's orders. The question before us is, why is EKD so afraid of mentioning the Ovaherero and Nama peoples by name? We are Ovaherero! We are Nama people! Call us by our names.
3. It should be noted. Historically speaking, Black people the world over have always been forgiving. But forgiveness requires EKD atones for its acknowledged sins. Showing humility in its apology by appearing before the Ovaherero and Nama peoples and ask forgiveness is what is proper, and morally right.

4. Unlike in 1904-1908, EKD must align itself with the interests of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples this time around. Forgiveness requires EKD rejects the joint declaration between Germany and Namibia for its glaring shortcomings and the guaranteed harm it will bring to the Ovaherero and Nama peoples.
5. Forgiveness requires EKD implores the German government to include OTA and NTLA in the negotiations, and not splitting hair with terminologies.
6. Ovaherero and Nama peoples are endowed by their Creator with the capacity to speak for themselves. Clearly, our power skills have served us well navigating the adverse effects genocide has brought us for over 118 years.
7. The time is now for EKD to intentionally “shine its light on the darkness of human history and exposes the vile crime of genocide”.
8. I am reminded of the powerful story that took place in Kiel, Germany. In 1931, “the last night Chanukah fell on Friday evening, as Rabbi Posner was hurrying to light the Menorah before the Shabbat set in. Adjacent to the Posner’s home stood the Nazi building and flag. The Rabbi’s wife took a picture of the Menorah which captured the Nazi building and the flag in the background. She wrote these words on the back of the photograph. “Our light will outlast their flag” (<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/menorah-defies-nazi-flag>). So, too, shall the Ovaherero and Nama peoples’ resolve for true (1) **Recognition of** genocide; (2) an **Apology**, and (3) **Reparations** from the Federal Republic of Germany.
9. In calling for the re-negotiation of the joint declaration, Dr. Kustaa, provides the following justification. “The end result of such faulty negotiations was a bogus joint declaration that the SWAPO government reached with the outgoing government of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The reason for this failure is due to the following problems: 1) exclusion of the Ovaherero and Nama affected communities in Namibia and the Diaspora and their leaders from participation in the negotiations by the two governments; 2) Namibian government creation and presentation of an unrepresented negotiating team headed by the late Dr. Zed Ngavirue; 3) the Namibian government’s retention of a veto power over the issues identified by Ngavirue’s team to be submitted to FRG. In my view, this is what led some of the government-aligned chiefs balk at the declaration for not containing what they had asked for. 4) incompetence and general lack of knowledge of the SWAPO government’s negotiators about the history of Jewish negotiations on reparations following the Holocaust with the government of Chancellor Dr. Konrad Adenauer; and 5) Chancellor Angela Merkel’s general absence from the negotiations that were dominated by her ambassadors”, with condescending attitudes towards the Ovaherero and Nama peoples.
10. In his address to the Bundestag on January 27th, 2010, the President of Israel, Shimon Peres said the following. “On September 27th, 1951, from the Bundestag podium, Adenauer spoke about the responsibility of the German people for the crimes of the Third Reich against the Jewish people, and the intention of his government to devise a compensation agreement for the loss of Jewish property and help in the revival process of Israel.”
11. Ovaherero and Nama peoples implore Chancellor Olaf Scholz to rise to the occasion and directly meet with OTA and NTLA leadership and not going through intermediaries. It must be understood that Genocide remains the Ovaherero and Nama peoples *Idee fixe*. Real

- negotiations between Ovaherero and Nama peoples and Germany, with the government of Namibia partaking as an interested party, is the only viable option to bring about the final resolution on this issue.
12. Clearly, as the evidence show, the government of Hage Geingob has proven not to be an omniscient entity, given what he and his government allowed themselves to be dictated to, and shamefully agreeing to the shallow terms of the German declaration.
 13. It is a misnomer to call it a joint declaration. Germany alone called the shots. Geingob's government just accepted the German Declaration without questioning it. One wonders why that is the case. The answer to that is clear as daylight. When your soul was never touched by the brutality of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples' genocide, your incompetency rises to the top.
 14. After three decades of independence, successive SWAPO governments have failed to declare a national holiday for the Ovaherero and Nama genocide. And when this is pointed out, President Hage Geingob, on cue, resorts to his usual trademark, hissy fit tirade. And it is clear that he absolutely has no ancestor veneration.
 15. Recently, Germany agreed to provide compensation to the relatives of the Israeli athletes massacred at the 1972 Munich Olympic games. Germany's initial offer was rejected by the relatives, who threatened to boycott the 50th anniversary activities.
 16. Germany came back with a better offer and the boycott was averted. The Israeli government was fully engaged in the negotiations for the resolution.
 17. "In a joint statement, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Isaac Herzog, President of Israel, expressed their happiness that an agreement on historical clarification had been reached", BBC News.
 18. This is what competent governments do in advocating better deals for their citizens. One should always negotiate, but by the same token, one must also be prepared to walk away from a bad deal, period! On this point, Geingob's government has utterly and miserably failed.
 19. Recently, The German government announced there will be no new negotiations on the Ovaherero and Nama genocide. How did Hage Geingob's government respond to this arrogance? Total silence. The *modus operandi* is. Germany dictates; Hage Geingob's government dutifully acquiesces. Geingob's government was exposed for its lack of the wherewithal to challenge Germany. Winston Churchill said this, "Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is."
 20. As Professor Isaak points out in his article titled 'The deafening silence of Namibian churches on genocide'. We still see the glorification of those responsible for the killing of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples in German Lutheran churches all over Germany, as well as in the Lutheran Christuskirche, in Windhoek, Namibia, with no acknowledgment of the victims of the Schutztruppe.
 21. The plaque inside the Christuskirche reads as follows. "In respectful memory of the comrades who have fallen since the creation of the German Protectorate and of the German citizens, women, and children who have given their lives for the Protectorate since this date, dedicated by the Schutztruppe and the population of this country." I concur with Professor

Isaak and add that the Namibian Lutheran Church suffers from a serious case of paralysis on the Ovaherero and Nama genocide. Its silence is unforgivable.

22. The story on the sacrifice the Ovaherero and Nama peoples made during the war of annihilation must be told. The suffering of our people is forever indelibly etched in our souls. Our mothers, when realizing their new-born babies had zero chance of survival, made the unimaginable, gut-wrenching decision to nurse the soldiers instead of their dying babies. Their milk provided much needed sustenance to those who had a better chance of survival ensuring future generations.
23. Our people died drinking from poisoned waterholes. Our people died of starvation and thirst in the Kalahari Desert. Our people were killed by the crocodiles as they crossed the mighty Limpopo River into South Africa as they were seeking sanctuary.
24. I, along with many others, stand on the shoulders of my people. As descendants, we are reminded everyday by our great-great-grand-parents, saying you are who you are because of our ultimate sacrifice. You must always fight for justice. We are called to duty to never be weary. We shall never fold. And to quote Baldwin, "We must tell the truth till we can no longer bear it." And, as Congressman John Lewis extolls us, we shall forever be getting in good trouble, necessary trouble in speaking on behalf our people who could not speak for themselves from 1904-1908.
25. We, the Ovaherero and Nama peoples shall never, ever abdicate our responsibility to fight for restorative justice from Germany, and we do so, believing, as Langston Hughes tells us that "We have tomorrow bright before us."

To the German citizenry, I say let's join hands together and seize the moment that is before us. Be the "beacon of light in darkness." It is within your grasp to redeem the soul of the nation. "That opportunity rest on what we do in the moment. To bear witness in the after times is hard on the soul", as Eddie Glaude, Jr. reminds us. Use your electoral power to convince your elected representatives to take the moral high ground and do the right thing.

I believe that hope springs eternal. As a descendant of *Otjitiro Otjindjandja*, and with you, my brothers, and sisters, on our side, I shall keep hope alive. The alternative is not a viable option. As Ellis tells us, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice". And justice shall prevail, perhaps not in my lifetime, but prevail it shall.

I thank you!

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