

Namibia says German colonial-era genocide reparations offer not enough



Protesters hold a sign reading "Reparations to descendants instead of 'development aid' to Namibia" at a demonstration in Berlin on May 28. (File photo)

Windhoek, June 6 (RHC)-- Germany's offer to fund projects in Namibia worth \$1.22 billion over 30 years in compensation for its genocide and property seizures in its former African colony is "not enough," says Namibia's Vice President Nangolo Mbumba.

"We need to recognize that the amount of 1.1 billion euros agreed upon between the two governments is not enough and does not adequately address the initial quantum of reparations initially submitted to the German Government," Mbumba said during a press briefing on the outcome of six years of negotiations with Berlin that concluded last month.

"No amount of money in any currency can truly compensate the life of a human being," Mbumba added as the government sought to explain to Namibians the details of the compensation talks.

On May 28, Germany finally apologized for its role in the slaughter of Herero and Nama tribespeople in Namibia over a century ago and officially described the massacre as genocide for the first time as it agreed to fund projects. "I don't think that any Namibian would think that the money is enough to compensate for all that happened – to be killed, to be chased out of your country; no amount of money can do that," he said.

"These are historic choices we have to make, very difficult as they are. If there were other opportunities to squeeze money out of the Germans, we could have done it," Mbumba added.

The development came after Herero paramount Chief Vekuii Rukoro censured as "an insult" the deal concluded last week by the governments in Berlin and Windhoek since it did not include payment of reparations. Rukoro also blasted the "agreement" as a "sellout," insisting, "We have a problem with that kind of an agreement, which we feel constitutes a complete sellout on the part of the Namibian government."

Rukoro, who unsuccessfully sued Germany for compensation in the United States, said the purported settlement was not enough for the two Namibian communities which had suffered "irreversible harm" at the hands of the German colonial forces.

Berlin last week categorically ruled out financial reparations forming part of a planned formal apology to Namibia for Germany's colonial atrocities amid fears such payments could set a legal precedent for further claims.

Germany has formally recognized crimes committed by its colonial troops at the beginning of the 20th century against Namibian people as genocide. Thousands of Herero and Nama tribes were massacred by German colonial forces between 1904 and 1908, after the local population waged an uprising against German rule in the colony, then named German South West Africa.

Survivors were then forced into the desert, where many ended up in brutal concentration camps and used as slave labor while many perished from cold, malnutrition and exhaustion.

An estimated 65,000 of the 80,000 Herero living in German South West Africa, and 10,000 of an estimated 20,000 Namas reportedly perished during the period. Germany ruled Namibia from 1884 until it lost the colony during World War I. In 1920, the territory was placed under the South African administration until 1990 when it gained independence from the Apartheid regime.

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas claimed in a statement last week that as a "gesture of recognition of the immeasurable suffering," Germany would fund the projects in Namibia over 30 years, saying the aim was to compensate the southern African nation for the role Germany played in committing genocide in its former colony.

Maas said the alleged reconciliation came after more than half a decade of efforts. It includes naming the events of the German colonial period in particular the atrocities in the period from 1904 to 1908 "without sparing or glossing over." "We will now, also in an official capacity, call these events what they were from today's perspective — a genocide," the top German diplomat added without extending an apology.

Angela Merkel's government has since 2014 negotiated with Namibia to "heal the wounds" of what historians call the first genocide of the 20th century. Berlin in 2018 returned skulls and other remains of massacred tribes people that were used in the colonial-era experiments to proclaim racial superiority of Europeans.

The German government has previously admitted "moral responsibility" for the brutal carnage of the Namibian people, but has avoided an official apology in efforts to evade compensation demands.

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