



Genocide Watch  
The Alliance Against Genocide

## Namibia: Germany Acknowledges Its Colonial Genocide

During the [Scramble for Africa](#), in 1884 the German Empire under Chancellor Otto Van Bismarck gained control over the current Namibia and created the colony of [German Southwest Africa](#). German colonial rule systematically exploited, dehumanized, and marginalized the African people in the colony.

In 1901, German anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel coined the term [Lebensraum](#) (Lit. living space), to justify German territorial expansion. The ideology was used to justify extermination of the Herero and Nama peoples in Southwest Africa, and later it was used to justify the genocide of Jews and Slavs under Nazism. The idea of seeking space for the "master" German race was first implemented in colonial Namibia. As the inhabitants of valuable farming and grazing land desired by German settlers, the Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia became prime targets of German Lebensraum policies.

After a decade of subjugation, abuse, rape, and forced deportation under German rule, the Herero and Nama people violently rebelled against the colonial government. In response, under the command of [Lothar von Trotha](#), the colonial army, or [Schutztruppen](#), embarked on a brutal campaign of total annihilation of the Herero and Nama. In 1904, German forces armed with machine guns and artillery defeated the Herero insurgency at the [Battle of Waterberg](#). Many more Herero died from starvation and thirst attempting to flee across the Kalahari Desert.

Over the next three years, under the *Vernichtungsbefehl* or "annihilation order" issued by General von Trotha, German troops were ordered to shoot any Herero man, woman, or child they encountered. The colonial authorities also established an extensive system of [concentration camps](#) that used Herero and Nama captives as slave labor. In the largest camps, such as Shark Island and Swakopmund, over 80 % of the prisoners died. [German scientists and doctors](#), including Nazi eugenicist Eugen Fisher, conducted medical experiments on Herero and Nama prisoners, in order to prove German racial superiority.

In 1990, Namibia gained independence from South Africa. Germans living in Namibia still have disproportionate control over the nation's economy. Victims of the German genocide began to seek recognition and reparations from Germany. German President Roman Herzog [visited Namibia](#) and met with Herero leaders to express his regret for German crimes against Africans in Southwest Africa, but he stopped short of an apology.

Herero descendants filed two unsuccessful [lawsuits](#) against the German government in 2001 and 2017, and another is ongoing at the writing of this report. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Germany became [the first nation](#) to recognize its colonial crimes as genocide. Germany pledged \$ 1.34 billion to Namibia in aid over the next thirty years. Germany apologized to Namibians and called the German crimes "genocide." But it refused to call the aid money "reparations," fearing that use of the word would open the door to private lawsuits.

Many Herero and Nama descendants consider this [inadequate compensation](#) for imperial Germany's crimes. Genocide Watch applauds Germany's acknowledgement of its genocide against the Herero and Nama peoples, and its other crimes against humanity during German colonial rule. However, Germany should settle the lawsuits brought by Herero and Nama descendants and pay reparations to them.

Genocide Watch considers German response to colonial German genocide in Namibia to be major progress, but without paying reparations to Herero and Nama descendants, the situation is still at **Stage 10: Denial**.

### Genocide Watch Recommends:

1. Germany should fund construction of memorials, educational programs, and other forms of remembrance for the victims of Germany's colonial genocide against the Herero, Nama and other Namibians.
2. German Namibians, who still retain the best farmland acquired during the colonial era, should be compensated by Germany, and some of their lands restored to Herero and Nama farming communities.
3. Namibia should establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, funded by Germany, to investigate, hold public hearings, and establish a research institute and educational curriculum on Namibia's colonial past.