

Berlin, 23 November 2018

To the
Federal Government
Federal States
Municipalities
in Germany

100 years after the end of the German colonial empire: Declaration of the nationwide network for the decolonization of memory culture

The 25th of November 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the end of the German colonial empire in Africa, Oceania and Asia. This brutal assertion of German imperial interests during the 35 years of direct colonial rule cost the lives of an estimated one million people- especially those of African origin. Germany's genocide of the Herero and Nama, the Maji-Maji War and Lettow-Vorbeck's campaign in the First World War in East Africa were crimes against humanity.

Colonialism and anti-colonial resistance have been repressed from the collective memory of the majority of German society. Yet the colonial era not only lastingly transformed the former colonies, but Germany itself is a society that has been decisively shaped by 600 years of European colonialism. The continuing structural and institutional racism in Germany testifies to this. It is reflected in hundreds of colonial racist street names and monuments. And it is evidenced by the presence of thousands of human remains that were abducted into German collections for inhuman research. Tens of thousands of cultural artefacts acquired in the colonial context of violence in German museums remind us too of this.

The colonial overexploitation of man and nature continue today in the form of ongoing global injustice: unequal distribution of wealth, resources and political influence. People in Africa and in the African diaspora are particularly affected by structural discrimination. In order to point this out and to acknowledge the contribution of people in Africa and the African diaspora to addressing the resulting challenges, the United Nations proclaimed 2015 the International Decade for People of African Descent.

For these reasons we welcome the fact that the Federal Government named colonialism for the first time as one of the central themes of memory culture in Germany in its 2018 Coalition Agreement. At the same time, we strongly protest against their view that this memory culture will only be about "German colonial history". Colonial history is not solely a national history, but also an interwoven history of coloniser and colonized, a history which can no longer be interpreted unilaterally by the coloniser. Above all it is also unacceptable that German colonialism is not explicitly recognised as an unjust regime - in contrast to the Nazi regime of terror that is clearly condemned in the coalition agreement, and the SED regime, which is also critically assessed.

We thereby call upon **the federal government, the federal states and the municipalities** to:

- name **colonialism as an injustice** and to unequivocally condemn it, in accordance with Article 14 of the Declaration of the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban 2001, which the Federal Government signed.

- immediately stop any research on **human remains** from colonial contexts that do not serve the repatriation of these remains. The identification and return of human remains abused for colonial racist research is one of the most urgent historical-political tasks of our time and should be carried out together with experts from societies of origin. The affected formerly colonised states and communities must be informed immediately about the whereabouts of their abducted ancestors and this must be recorded in an online database. In order to cope with this task as quickly as possible, sufficient funds should be made available at short notice. Anyone who spends 600 million euros on setting up the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Castle cannot speak of a lack of funds concerning this point.

- follow the example of the federal states of Hamburg and Berlin, who have already offered apologies to the descendants of the victims of the German **genocide** of the Herero and Nama people (1904-08). It is unacceptable that an acknowledgement of the genocide and an official apology by the Bundestag and the Federal Government has still not taken place despite years of German-Namibian government negotiations. The self-determined representatives of the Herero and Nama must no longer be excluded from these crucial negotiations, in accordance with UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Within the framework of the dialogue demanded by them, the amount of the compensation to be paid to the Herero and Nama communities for the land and livestock robbery carried out by the German government within the framework of the genocide must also be negotiated.

- provide and advance the **provenance research** on cultural objects from colonial contexts in German museums and collections with considerably more financial means, research which has been neglected for decades. The circumstances of the unequal appropriation or the theft of cultural property must be worked out in close cooperation with experts from the societies concerned and successively placed in a publicly accessible online database in several languages. The societies concerned should be proactively informed about the whereabouts of the cultural objects acquired in contexts of colonial violence.

- follow the planned **restitution** of objects from Hendrik Witboois' private property by Baden-Württemberg with further restitutions of cultural assets acquired by force. We reject the proposal to lend captured objects to the societies of origin, as is intended for the Benin bronzes, as an imposition on those who were expropriated. Rather, the restitution of all objects from colonial contexts whose legal acquisition cannot be proven must be offered. The conditions for the restitution of such cultural objects from the period 1884-1918, during which time parts of Africa, Oceania and Asia were under German rule, must be created over the next four years.

- develop **comprehensive concepts** for the critical examination of colonial history and its consequences as well as for the decolonisation of memory culture at the federal, state and local levels. These concepts are to be developed and

implemented with the participation of the descendants of the colonized and in close cooperation with civil society initiatives.

- erect **memorials** for the victims of colonialism, enslavement and racism as well as learning and memorial sites on the site of the Berlin Conference on Africa 1884/85 and in other cities in Germany. The nationwide and regional organizations of the descendants of the colonized must be decisively involved in the conception of such memorial sites from the very beginning. These places of remembrance should be taken into account in the federal government's memorial site concept, as should those relating to the Nazi terror regime and the SED regime. The aim is to financially support the descendants of the colonized in the erection and equipping of memorials as well as learning and memorial sites in Germany's former colonies.

- **rename streets** that honour colonialists and criminals or that uphold racist conceptions with the names of personalities of the anti-colonial resistance. The naming histories of the streets should subsequently be made visible on an information board. Critical comment boards are needed on streets whose names refer to colonial history through place names or in some other way.

- globalize and diversify the **teaching of history** at schools and universities. The critical confrontation with European colonialism and racism as well as the memory and appreciation of anti-colonial resistance must be given a central place in the curricula of schools, universities and teacher training institutions. The cooperation of educational institutions with external education experts from initiatives for decolonisation and against racism should be promoted more strongly. The new federal programme "Youth Reminds" is to be expanded thematically to include a critical examination of European and German colonialism. In addition, a Namibian-German textbook commission is to be convened.

- decolonise public **museums**. Most European museums are still today based on the Eurocentric and nationalist ideas of the 19th century, which led to a racist construction of the non-European "other". In the exhibition narratives, the violence of colonial history is also often played down or silenced. The descendants of the colonised must be invited as key experts in order to be included in the museum teams.

AfricAvenir International

AFROTAK TV cyberNomads

Arbeitskreis Hamburg Postkolonial

Arbeitskreis Koloniales Vergessen. Quo Vadis, Hamburg?

Arbeitskreis Panafrikanismus München

Arca - Afrikanisches Bildungszentrum e. V.

Augsburg postkolonial

Berlin Postkolonial

Berliner Entwicklungspolitischer Ratschlag – BER

Bielefeld Postkolonial

Cottbus postkolonial und postsozialistisch

Decolonize Hannover

decolonize Jena

Decolonise Academia; Tübingen

Düsseldorf postkolonial

Dresden Postkolonial

FuturAfrik – Forum für Globale Gerechtigkeit

Halle Postkolonial

Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland – ISD

kassel postkolonial

Kirchliche Arbeitsstelle Südliches Afrika – KASA

Leipzig Postkolonial

Mainzer Arbeitskreis Südliches Afrika - MAKSA

[muc] münchen postkolonial

Potsdam postcolonial

Schwarze Diaspora Hochschulgruppe Potsdam

Solidarische Kirche im Rheinland

Tanzania-Network.de