

Solidarische Kirche im Rheinland

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Mainzer Arbeitskreis Südliches Afrika (MAKSA)

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Declaration

Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) has to share responsibility for the genocide of the OvaHerero and Nama in Namibia.

The Centenary on July 9, 2015 of the end of German colonial rule over what was then German South-West Africa, put the first genocide of the 20th century, committed by the German 'Schutztruppe' throughout the years 1904-1908, once again on the political and societal agenda. The initiative "genocide must be called genocide" demanded of the federal president, the diet and the Government to finally recognize formally the genocide against the OvaHerero and the Nama. The German media in recent weeks took up that theme and even some politically prominent persons like the president of parliament, the honorary Norbert Lammert, as also the former minister for development policy, Ms. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, declared clearly and unambiguously their position in this regard.

What we complain about is that EKD maintains silence about the specific question whether churches share responsibility for that genocide in what is today Namibia. That must not continue. Because it was not only the former German empire's government, the military and the colonial administration that cooperated to effect the genocide in German South-West, but also the protestant church. The Prussian governing body of the church, predecessor of the EKD, dispatched in coordination with the government some protestant pastors, to care spiritually for both the colonial settlers occupying indigenous land areas as well as the colonial troops protecting those settlers. Through pastoral care, church services and especially in preaching their sermons these German Pastors and church parishes were linked to, and participated in, the genocide. To wit:

- In the parish of Windhoek during church services the altar is decorated with the ensign and banner of the empire-at-war. The songs selected for service are taken from the army's hymnbook.(1)
- After the end of the Khama rebellion in 1896, Windhoek parish organizes a special thanksgiving service (2).
- In February 1904, the Pastor at Windhoek blesses the 2nd Marines Corps (3).
- The pastor of the Windhoek parish, Wilhelm Anz, is particularly grateful for the permission to hold two great field-services for the army while war operations

- against the Herero are ongoing (4).
- The army chaplain Max Schmidt participates in the military conflicts against the Nama in the South of Namibia (5).

In 2014 the then chairman of the EKD Council, Nikolaus Schneider addressed clearly the role of protestant theology and war-sermons at the start of the first World War in 1914: “100 years ago even the churches burdened themselves with guilt; they got carried away by the general war frenzy, they even helped arouse it.” - That is not only true for the First World War, but also for the genocide in Namibia. German Protestants in particular debated widely the annihilation merited by the rebelling Herero. Very few missionaries and socialdemocratic MPs opposed that view.

In 2004 the Council together with the Synod of the EKD missed the opportunity to acknowledge responsibility.

Chairman Schneider publicly declared in October 2004 that churches shared responsibility for the first genocide of the 20th century (6), when he unveiled a memorial reminding us of the genocide next to a colonial monument in Düsseldorf. The 2004 synod of the EKD in Magdeburg, however, 100 years after the start of the genocide in Namibia, failed to take a stand on the issue. But the very same synod reminded the public of the genocide in Armenia in 1914 and demanded of the German and the Turkish Governments to accept their share of responsibility for it.

In 2005 the EKD organized a church service in the Berlin cathedral at the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian disaster, but in regard of the centenary of the genocide in Namibia the EKD neither utters clear comment nor is there a memorial service in a church. Therefore the time has come, that the EKD comes clean on Namibia.

We call on the responsible decision makers in the EKD to end their silence, to recognize the churches share of historical guilt, and to ask the descendants of the victims in the genocide for their forgiveness.

Köln, July 23rd, 2015; Mainz, February 21st, 2016

Notes:

1.) *Evangelischer Gemeinderat in Windhoek (Ed.), 25 Jahre Christuskirche in Windhuk, 1935*

2.) *ibidem*

3.) *ibidem*

4.) *ibidem*

5.) *Max Schmidt, Aus unserem Kriegsleben in Südwestafrika: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen, 1910*

6.) *Anna Neumann, Eine Mahntafel neben dem Kolonialdenkmal. In: Transparent 75/2005*

“Solidarische Kirche Im Rheinland” is a group of 180 church members in the tradition of the Confessing Church during the Nazi-Era. In connection with the World Council of Churches (WCC) Solidarische Kirche is engaged for justice, peace and integrity of creation.

“Mainzer Arbeitskreis Südliches Afrika”(MAKSA) since 1972 pleads for cutting legal relations EKD – Deutsche Kirchen im südlichen Afrika. Most of its members of MAKSA have lived and worked in Southern Africa for many years. Some of them were expelled by the Apartheid regime.