

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF
THE GENOCIDE MEMORIAL STATUE,
THE SAM NUJOMA STATUE AND THE
INDEPENDENCE MEMORIAL MUSEUM**

20 MARCH 2014

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery*

Your Excellency, Comrade Sam Nujoma, Founding President and Father of the Nation,
Right Honourable Dr Hage Geingob, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia,
Honourable Dr Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker of the National Assembly,
Honourable Asser Kapere, Chairperson of the National Council,
Your Honour Peter Shivute, Chief Justice,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Service Chiefs
Madam First Lady,
Honourable Governors,
Your Worship, the Mayor of the City of Windhoek and other Mayors,
Honourable Regional and Local Authority Councillors,
Distinguished Chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders,
Esteemed Leaders of Political Parties,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Esteemed Traditional and Spiritual Leaders,
Veterans of the National Liberation Struggle,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Members of the Media,
Fellow Namibians,

We are gathered here today in the heart of our Capital City, and on the eve of the commemoration of the 24th Anniversary of the attainment of our national freedom and independence, to witness a ceremony that will go down as one of the most significant events in our nation's history.

Successful nations are those that learn from and appreciate their history. Our people were oppressed for more than a century, from 1st July 1890 to 20 March 1990. However, the nation stood firm in defence of our Motherland and resisted the tyranny of two successive colonial regimes.

Director of Ceremonies,

We are gathered here to witness three events of historic importance, namely, the unveiling of the Genocide Memorial Statue, the unveiling of the Sam Nujoma Statue and the inauguration of the Independence Memorial Museum.

Today, our nation is in a somber mood as we inaugurate this Genocide Memorial Statue. We are filled with mixed emotions. Emotions of sadness because we recall the horrors that our people were subjected to by the colonial troops, and emotions of pride because through this Memorial, we are saying, as a nation, that despite the hardships, we prevailed and emerged victorious. Thousands have lost their lives during that war, however, we are fortified by the knowledge that the current and future generations will continue to carry the flame of the revolution forward.

This Genocide Memorial Statue was conceived and erected as a national symbol in remembrance of all our people who lost their lives and were subjected to untold hardships and suffering at the hands of the heartless and heavy-handed soldiers of the *Schutztruppe* and the entire German colonial machinery.

At this very location, a concentration camp was built. Within its walls, our people were dehumanized. They were tortured, starved, and summarily killed without any regard to their dignity and their humanity. They were treated worse than the beasts of the veld. No distinction was made by the *Schutztruppe* and the rest of the German colonial machinery whether they were men, women or children. They were all brutalized without mercy.

As if that was not enough, General Lothar von Trotha, a well-known war monger who was notorious for brutality and who had fiercely suppressed African resistance to German colonization in East Africa, was sent to our country.

He was noted to have said, and I quote *“I wipe out rebellious tribes with streams of blood and streams of money. Only following this cleansing can something new emerge”*. Von Trotha brought with him to the then German South West Africa 10,000 heavily armed men, ready to annihilate our people.

In October 1904, he issued the infamous Extermination Order which was directed particularly at the Herero communities.

In a blood-chilling tone, the Extermination Order stated categorically as follows, and I quote, *“The Herero people must leave the land. If the populace does not do this, I will force them with the Cannon. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. No more prisoners will be taken. These are my words to the Herero people”*.

Thus, began the first genocide of the 20th Century. What followed from 1904 to 1907, was a wholesale massacre of our people, including those from the Mbanderu, Nama, Damara, San and Ovawambo communities.

After the war of extermination, the German colonial authorities erected several monuments, statues and other symbols of remembrance in honour of their soldiers and settlers who died or fought during the colonial wars. Special cemeteries were established to honour the German war dead. Streets and public places were named in honour of the supposed German heroes. Moreover, colonial monuments were erected on the graves of our people and their skulls and human remains taken to colonial Germany as trophies.

Many of these symbols are still standing in many towns across Namibia today. Here in Windhoek, our Capital City, we have the Leutwein Statue in front of the City Hall, various streets still carry the names of governors, commissioners and soldiers who brutalised our people in such unspeakable ways.

One of the most infamous, and yet prominent statues in Windhoek is the Rider Statue, or the Soldier on Horseback, which for more than a century had been located at this spot. The purpose and rationale for the erection of that statue is well-known.

It was erected to serve as a memorial to the German soldiers and settlers who had lost their lives in the wars against the Namibian people and to symbolize the victory of the Imperial German Forces over the Namibian people.

This was made clear by Theodore Zeitz, the Governor of German South West Africa at that time. During the inauguration of the Rider Statue in 1912. He stated as follows, and I quote: *“The principle behind this monument is to honour the dead and to encourage the living to propagate and build up what had been achieved in a hard war, fought selflessly for the love of the Fatherland. The venerated colonial soldier that looks out over the land from here announces to the world that we are the masters of this place, now and forever”*.

We, the Namibian people, have refused to accept that those who sought to colonise and wipe us out, are the masters of our country. It is for this reason that, our people, from the turn of the 20th Century, to the modern liberation struggle, resisted and fought bitter wars to dislodge the colonialists from our country. We fought with determination until final victory was achieved on 21 March 1990. We became the masters of this place, now and forever. Not the colonialists. Never again will our Motherland be colonized.

In recent months, the Rider Statue has been in the news because it was removed from its long-held pedestal to make way for the Genocide Memorial Statue. Through this monument, the Namibian nation has spoken with one voice and given a fitting tribute to the victims of the war of genocide. We owe this to the victims of the genocide and to ourselves as a nation.

Some members of our population have objected to the removal of the Rider Statue from this location.

To them, I would like to say: take a few minutes, and reflect on the horrors of that war. Take a few minutes and think about the victims of the genocide and the descendants of those victims.

Yet again, take a few minutes and put yourself in the shoes of the victims and their descendants. Is it right for a statue of that nature to be located on top of the human remains of our people? Is it right for a statue of that nature to be located on the spot of the concentration camp where our people were held and died horrible deaths?

In good conscience, the right decision by this nation was to remove the Rider Statue and all that it represents from this prominent location.

Director of Ceremonies,

It is in honour of our fallen heroes and heroines, those who gave their lives, those who resisted German colonialists with all their might and those who never gave up in the face of a merciless enemy, that we dedicate the Genocide Memorial Statue today.

Our people endured untold hardships. They were interned in concentration camps. They were dehumanized by foreigners, whose objective was to occupy our Motherland, plunder our natural resources, steal our land and enslave our people by the brute force of arms.

This Memorial Statue must always remind our people and indeed all others, that we will never forget what happened to our people at the turn of the 20th Century. We will never forget the pain, the suffering and the humiliation. Doing so would be tantamount to an abdication of our patriotic duty to honour our history, and a betrayal of those who pioneered the struggle for our freedom and national independence.

Director of Ceremonies,

Namibia's modern liberation struggle was inspired by the bravery, heroism and patriotism of our forebearers who resisted German colonialism and other intruders.

From the 1950s, we continued with the anti-colonial resistance that was started by our forebearers. We adopted the motto of “*One Namibia One Nation*” as the uniting principle of our struggle for national liberation and the mobilization of all our people.

From 1959 to its victorious conclusion in 1990, our modern struggle was led by one of the most dedicated and outstanding Namibian patriots, His Excellency Dr Sam Nujoma, Founding President of our Republic and Father of the Namibian Nation.

Comrade Nujoma crisscrossed the world, mobilizing African countries and the international community to support the just cause of our people under the leadership of the National Liberation Movement, SWAPO of Namibia. Through sheer determination, he achieved great feats that advanced our national liberation struggle towards final victory.

These include negotiating with Governments of independent African countries to provide refuge to our people who were fleeing the country of their birth into exile, because of repression by apartheid colonialism; obtaining permission from various African countries to establish training bases for our freedom fighters; securing diplomatic, political, material and military support from different countries around the world; and obtaining diplomatic status for SWAPO by several countries and organizations around the world.

Together with other Namibian compatriots, Dr Nujoma petitioned the United Nations and advanced our cause for freedom through the Frontline States, the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement. His tireless work in search of our freedom will always be remembered by those who cherish our hard won freedom and independence.

During the struggle for independence, he motivated and encouraged the cadres of the armed wing of SWAPO, PLAN, to fight with courage and determination until final victory was achieved.

He was also the main architect of our Policy of National Reconciliation. Upon his return to Namibia on 14 September 1989 after 29 years in exile, Comrade Sam Nujoma restated the importance and centrality of this policy to the future development of the new Republic.

After the attainment of our independence, Comrade Nujoma laid a strong foundation as the Founding President of our Republic. As the Namibian nation, we thank him for his leadership, statesmanship, patriotism and dedicated service to our country.

It is, therefore, fitting and appropriate that today, at this location, next to the Independence Memorial Museum, and on the eve of our nation's 24th Independence Anniversary, we dedicate this statue to him and indeed to the thousands of Namibians who contributed to our modern national liberation struggle, to those who sacrificed their lives on the battle front, to those who died in various massacres, those who were thrown into the ocean, and those who were tortured, imprisoned and detained because of their resistance to oppression and segregation.

With the Namibian constitution in hand, this monument represents a new era of constitutionalism, rule of law, as well as the protection and enjoyment of the fundamental human rights by all our citizens in a free and democratic Republic.

Director of Ceremonies,

On 21st March 1990, we became the masters of our own destiny. We assumed the duty of determining our own course of development and building a society where all our people can achieve their full potential. Similarly, we assumed the duty of recording and preserving our nation's history.

The construction of this Independence Memorial Museum is part of the fulfillment of that sacred task to tell, record and preserve our own history, as we perceive it, as we experience it and as we see it with our own eyes.

Cabinet, therefore, took a decision to establish the Independence Memorial Museum to serve as the central repository of material and memorabilia related to Namibia's anti-colonial resistance and the armed liberation struggle. With the completion of this Museum, Namibia now has a central place where our nation's long history of anti-colonial resistance and the national liberation struggle is being told. Visitors to the Museum will be taken on an unforgettable journey.

The displays in the Museum tell Namibia's history from the early times, when our people lived mainly as pastoralists, to the historic day of the birth of our Republic on 21st March 1990. The history of Namibia and the diversity of our people is told in captivating details. This Museum is indeed a welcome addition to our national efforts to reinforce a common identity and a sense of belonging for all Namibians.

I call upon historians, researchers, academicians and other individuals to contribute to the further development of this important national institution, by providing information that can help to improve the Museum's collections.

Director of Ceremonies,

The two statues that we unveil today, and the Independence Memorial Museum that we officially inaugurate, represent our collective will to honour our heroes and heroines from different epochs of Namibian history. Today, we are speaking with one voice that our history is an important part of who we are as a nation.

We will continue to be inspired by the exemplary deeds of our forebearers and by our leaders such as Comrade Sam Nujoma, who led our country during its formative years as a free Republic.

We will continue to move forward with confidence, knowing where we come from. Our history has taught us well. With unity of purpose and action, Namibia's best days are still ahead of us!

It is now my pleasure to declare the Genocide Memorial Statue and the Sam Nujoma Statue officially unveiled, and at the same time, to declare the Independence Memorial Museum officially inaugurated.

Glory to the Memories of the Victims of the 1904-1907 Genocide!

Glory to the Heroes and Heroines of the Namibian Revolution!

Their blood waters our freedom.

Long Live the Republic of Namibia!

I thank you.