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Olaf Scholz

Erster Bürgermeister der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg und Präsident des Senats  
Senatskanzlei

## **OPEN LETTER TO THE CITY OF HAMBURG AND THE PEOPLE OF HAMBURG**

We, the leadership of the Association of the Ovaherero Genocide in the United States of America, are compelled to write an open letter to the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and its people about our deep disappointment in how the City of Hamburg has chosen to ignore its historical role in the events that have contributed to the genocide of the Ovaherero and the Nama people in the former German Southwest Africa.

We are the direct descendants of the genocide committed by the *Schutztruppe* on behalf and on direct orders of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The *Schutztruppe* set sail to German Southwest Africa, now Namibia, from the City of Hamburg. The man the Kaiser entrusted with his war machinery of extermination was none other than Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha. He too, set sail to Namibia from Hamburg.

Von Trotha was a war criminal and should not be treated as a hero and glorified by the City of Hamburg and its people, who may not know the full extent of his role in the extermination of the Ovaherero and the Nama people. He poisoned waterholes and then drove the surviving unarmed men, women and children into the Kalahari Desert to

die of thirst. Lothar committed heinous crimes against humanity, and the city should dissociate itself from any relationship it has with him.

The glorification of von Trotha should be unacceptable to the people of Hamburg. His presence through symbols tarnishes the soul of the magnificent city of Hamburg. The symbols are painful reminders to us, the descendants of the first 20<sup>th</sup> century genocide, on how our people were murdered, while the world remained silent then and continue to be silent today. For us the descendants to remain silent, is tantamount to dishonoring the ultimate sacrifice made by our great grandparents. This is painful to us.

We, therefore, appeal to the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and its people to do the right thing by taking the following measurable actions, which can be the genesis of the healing process.

1. We are disappointed that one of the buildings at the Bundeswehr Universitat Hamburg, also known as the Helmut Schmidt Universitat, bears the name of Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha. Von Trotha broke every military rule of engagement steeped in the rich tradition of the revered Prussian Army of the day. In our view, this is not something the new military conscripts and future soldiers and leaders of the Bundeswehr should emulate. To make matters worse is that those who enter that building have no idea of who Von Trotha was. This part of the German history is being intentionally left out and it is not taught to the cadets. We are appealing to the City of Hamburg to pass an ordinance to have the name of Lothar von Trotha removed from the façade of the building.

2. We appeal to the people of faith who worship at Der Michel (Saint Michael) to realize that the history being told through the plaque at the church, honors the perpetrators of the war of extermination and not its victims. We are cognizant of the fact that the German Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church were present in Namibia during the war of extermination, but chose to look the other way. It is because of this that the silence of those who worship at and visit Der Michel perpetuates the one-sided history being told. We ask that the suffering of the victims of the Vernichtungsbefehl also be highlighted so that the public can learn from *it*.
3. The Ovaherero and Nama genocide was a dress rehearsal for what would happen during the NAZI Holocaust because words like “Endlosung and Konzentrationslager” became part of the German language lexicon during the *Schutztruppe*’s brutal operation in Namibia.
4. Woermann’s “Afrikahaus”. Woermann’s company was directly involved in the extermination of the Ovaherero and Nama people. It is a company that benefitted from ill-gotten wealth derived from the use of slave labor. It became rich on the backs of the Ovaherero and the Nama victims of genocide. This is an unknown fact to the citizens of the City of Hamburg and it must be highlighted at the so-called Afrikahaus.

Given the history of the Woermann’s company involvement in Namibia, it is disappointing to us, the descendants that there are streets like “Woermannstieg” and

“Woermannsweg” in Hamburg named after a company that was directly involved in the genocide of the Ovaherero and the Nama people.

We are appealing to you, the City of Hamburg and the people of the City State of Hamburg that these streets be named after the victims of the genocide committed by Imperial Germany. We also believe that the German school curriculum needs to include the teaching of the Ovaherero and the Nama genocide, which is part of the German history that has been deliberately excluded from the curriculum.

The Federal Republic of Germany is a respected member of the United Nations, with the ambition of joining the United Nations Security Council, and given that we are in the second year of the UN Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024, the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and its citizens will be the beacon of hope for Germany’s citizens of African descent by its willingness to engage us in discourse to address our appeal.

We believe that this will send an unambiguous clarion call to the rest of Germany with reference to the Ovaherero and the Nama people genocide, and for Germany to look deep into her soul and take responsibility for the genocide it has committed against the Ovaherero and the Nama people from 1904 to 1908.

We believe in the power of a dialogue between people to talk about issues that are of paramount importance to them. The issues that we have raised are important to us. Our friendly appeal to the City and the people of Hamburg on the issues is a testament that we do subscribe and believe in the principles of a dialogue. It is against this background that we look forward to receiving your positive response to our appeal.

We are willing to travel from the United States to Hamburg to engage the leaders of the city and its civil society organizations on our permanent scars that will never heal until restorative justice is done. The City of Hamburg cannot be a perpetual reminder of our scars by its insensitivity to the Ovaherero and Nama people victims of Germany's first genocide. For further information, please contact me at the following Address:

Sincerely,