



## A Humanitarian Assessment of Africa and the First World War 1900—1932

Lead up, Progress, Aftermath

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. General Remarks

In 2001, at the third UN Anti-Racism Conference in Durban, South Africa, it was decided that slavery and colonialism should be classified as crimes against humanity. In December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the "International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024)". Its motto is "People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice and Development." The international community committed to promoting the recognition, rights and development of people of African descent and combating racial discrimination and racism by 2024. All member states also pledged to study the history and their own involvement in the slave trade and colonialism. The results should lead to rewriting educational textbooks, for example, and to museums in Germany becoming aware of their responsibility as repositories of looted art. At colleges and universities, the African continent and its societies should have a much greater share in imparting knowledge. In addition, archives and collections should be reviewed to locate and eventually return stolen bones and skulls, for example from Namibia. A UN working group visited Germany in 2017 and concluded that insufficient effort had been made to highlight the historical significance of Africa, and that not enough action had been taken against institutional racism and discrimination. To date, the UN Decade is hardly known in Germany and there are no efforts to implement the December 2013 resolution. On the contrary, the "positive aspects" of colonialism are emphasized in the German media and also by responsible political parties. With the strengthening of right-wing extremists in Europe, little will change in the future. Colonial revisionism and racist attitudes will continue to spread and will also influence the education sector and the understanding of non-European history. In addition, there is increasing international pressure on the Federal Republic of Germany. Representatives of the Herero and Nama victims' groups from Namibia have been trying since 2001 to bring a lawsuit against Germany, before various courts, so far without success. These groups demand an official apology from the German government and reparation payments, also from German companies and banks, for crimes committed against humanity and the genocide against the societies of Namibia. In the course of the subjugation and extermination of the societies of Namibia, among the victims were also Damara, San and Baster, about 100,000 people perished. The German government has so far refused any reparations, citing high development aid payments, and there has been no official apology either. Since spring 2020, the victim groups from Namibia are no longer alone and the governments of Burundi and Tanzania are also preparing lawsuits against the German government.

Tanzania accuses the Germans of war crimes during the Maji-Maji war and demands an official apology and reparations for this as well. About 300,000 Tanzanians lost their lives during this struggle. At the beginning of 2020, the Tanzanian ambassador in Berlin called for the opening of negotiations for reparations. He also demanded the return of human remains, such as bones and skulls, from German museums and collections, art objects, and a dinosaur skeleton on display in Berlin. At the same time, the government of Burundi began to set up a commission of experts to look into the German and Belgian colonial periods. This commission came to the conclusion that both the German and Belgian governments are responsible for crimes committed against humanity. The Burundian government is demanding reparations of 36 billion Euros from both countries. It is