

Petition on the formation of the new Federal Government

"Anchoring the reappraisal of German colonial history in the coalition agreement"

The debate on colonialism and its effects up to the present day is attracting increasing interest and media coverage in Germany (e.g. [Zeit-Magazin, 24 October 2024](#); [Tagesspiegel, 27 November 2024](#); [Der Spiegel, 19 September 2024](#)).

At a civil society level, local initiatives are researching colonial connections in their neighbourhoods. Museums, libraries and universities are increasingly focussing on the history of their colonial involvement as well as the origin of their collections and possible restitution to the societies of origin.

Some professional organisations, for example in the fields of architecture and law, are also researching their colonial history. Christian missionary societies are increasingly reflecting on their role during German colonial rule. Literature, theatre, film and the visual arts address Germany's colonial entanglements in numerous examples.

In the context of the controversial discussion about the federal memorial concept, numerous directors of memorials to the Nazi dictatorship and SED injustice are in favour of a third pillar of German remembrance policy on colonialism.

The current relevance of the topic in Germany is due in particular to decades of ground-laying work by diaspora communities, civil society initiatives and committed individuals.

Parallel to developments in Germany and the wider European context, the post-colonial nation states of the Global South are calling ever more loudly for the return of ancestors ("human remains") and cultural belongings ("cultural assets") taken abroad and for compensation for the injustice suffered.

For example, the governments of Cameroon, Tanzania and Ghana (the eastern part of the country belonged to German Togoland) have set up national committees to prepare strategies for restitution negotiations with the German government and other former colonial powers.

In this process, the use of terms such as "ancestors" and "cultural belongings" is an essential prerequisite for the dignified handling of so-called "collection from colonial contexts" in Germany.

The signatories of this petition are in favour of the future German government proactively working to come to terms with Germany's colonial history in its own country and in its foreign relations.

On the occasion of the upcoming coalition talks, we call on the parties involved to agree on the following measures:

- Expansion of the German **memorial concept** to include a third pillar "Colonialism".
- Clarification of the respective **departmental responsibilities** for dealing with German colonial history as part of a national concept.
- Preparation of a **law** for the repatriation of ancestors and against the trade in human remains.
- Creation of funding instruments for the **repatriation** of ancestors and cultural belongings (with the possibility of direct funding for representatives of affected communities as well as researchers, artists, etc. from communities of origin, e.g. to cover the costs of travelling, research and repatriation).
- Adequate **compensation** to recognise colonial injustice, taking into account the demands of affected communities and civil society.
- Long-term funding for the **contact point** for the identification of ancestors and cultural belongings at the "Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts".

- Increased funding for post-colonial **provenance research** via the "German Lost Art Foundation" (with the possibility of direct funding to societies of origin).
- Deepening **cooperation** with national, regional and local cultural institutions in the Global South (e.g. via programmes such as TheMuseumsLab, the Franco-German Provenance Research Fund, the Agency for International Museum Cooperation).
- Establishment of funding instruments for equal **scientific cooperation** between Germany and countries of the Global South for research into colonialism and its consequences.
- Creation of a concept and establishment of a **site of learning and remembrance of colonialism** that incorporates decentralised initiatives in Germany and memorial sites in the successor states of the former German colonies.
- Establishment of a civil society-scientific **advisory board** with international participation to advise the Federal Government on colonial history.
- Simplification **of visa issuance** to facilitate dialogue and cooperation, e.g. through fast-track procedures for cooperation projects with Germany.

As descendants of the perpetrators, we, the German society as a whole, have a responsibility to come to terms with the massive scale of colonial crimes. Dealing with this and the consequences that continue to have an impact today (keyword: racism) is not only important for strengthening historical judgement in this country. It also offers the opportunity for a new ethics of relationships between our societies, which are intertwined by colonial history.

The future German government can set an example here and initiate and support processes in coordination with the European Union, e.g. through new funding instruments and European-African cooperation projects.

In addition, the German government should take new initiatives towards the African Union and the African regional organisations, also in a European context, to come to terms with former colonial ties.

At the same time, the history and consequences of German colonialism in the Pacific region and in China should be made more visible.

Berlin, Frankfurt, Freiburg, 19 January 2025

Editorial group:

- Prof Dr Hansjörg Dilger, Free University of Berlin
- Prof. Dr Larissa Förster, Humboldt University of Berlin
- Dr Thomas Fues, blog "dekolonial-erinnern.de"
- Gita Herrmann, Curator
- Prof Dr Andreas Mehler, University of Freiburg
- Daniela Tschuschke, Tanzania Network e.V.

Contact: Gita Herrmann; Email: Kolonialgeschichte.KoaV@gmail.com