

Namibia condemns Germany for defending Israel in ICJ genocide case

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Namibian skulls from the German Empire's 1904-1907 genocide against the Herero and Nama people in then-German South West Africa are displayed during a repatriation ceremony at the French Cathedral in Berlin on Aug. 29, 2018. ADAM BERRY/GETTY IMAGES

Windhoek, January 15 (RHC)-- Namibia has criticized Germany's "shocking decision" to support Israel in the genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) brought by South Africa, as Israel's war on Gaza entered its 100th day.

“Germany has chosen to defend in the ICJ the genocidal and gruesome acts of the Israeli government against innocent civilians in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian Territories,” the president of Namibia, Hage Geingob, said in a statement on X on Saturday.

A two-day public hearing in the case at the World Court – the highest legal body of the United Nations – took place on Thursday and Friday during which South Africa and Israel presented their arguments.

South Africa told the court on Thursday that Israel’s aerial and ground offensive – which has laid waste to much of the enclave and killed almost 24,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities – aimed to bring about “the destruction of the population” of Gaza.

Israel accused South Africa of presenting a “distorted” view of the hostilities, denying that its military operation in Gaza is a state-led genocide campaign against Palestinians.

The statement by the Namibian presidency added that Berlin was ignoring Israel’s killing of more than 23,000 Palestinians in Gaza and various United Nations reports disturbingly highlighting the internal displacement of 85 percent of the besieged enclave’s 2.3 million people amid acute shortages of food and essential services.

The Namibian president expressed “deep concern” over “the shocking decision” communicated by the government of Germany on Friday, in which “it rejected the morally upright indictment” brought forward by South Africa.

“No peace-loving human being can ignore the carnage waged against Palestinians in Gaza,” it said.

The statement claimed that Germany committed the first genocide of the 20th century in Namibia between 1904 and 1908, in which tens of thousands of innocent Namibians died in the most inhumane and brutal conditions. “Germany cannot morally express commitment to the United Nations Convention against genocide, including atonement for the genocide in Namibia, whilst supporting the equivalent of a holocaust and genocide in Gaza,” the presidency said.

“President Geingob appeals to the German government to reconsider its untimely decision to intervene as a third-party in defence and support of the genocidal acts of Israel before the ICJ.”

German colonial forces carried out atrocities in Namibia against the Indigenous Herero and Nama peoples between 1904 and 1908. The killings were part of a German campaign of collective punishment between 1904 and 1908 that is today recognised as the 20th century’s first genocide.

Henning Melber from Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden said that the statement issued by President Geingob was an unexpected turning point in the already fragile German-Namibian relations. “Germany publicly took side in the ICJ case with Israel on January 12, which marks 120 years of the beginning of what many Namibians call the German-Namibian war, which then resulted in the first genocide of the 20th century,” he said.

“While Germany scored a lot of good points internationally in the way it engaged with the mass destruction of the holocaust, it was in denial of the genocide committee [with Namibia] until 2015,” Melber said. He added that in the last eight years the German and Namibian governments have been in negotiations on the Namibian genocide since 2015. He said Germany still falls short of recognising the incidents in Namibia as a genocide in legal terms, which means it refuses the obligations to pay reparations.

The ICJ is likely to present a provisional measure in the coming days but a final verdict will take years. South Africa has urged the court to order an immediate halt to Israel’s devastating military offensive in Gaza.

The 1948 Genocide Convention, enacted in the wake of the mass murder of Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

South Africa filed the ICJ case on December 19, accusing Israel of genocidal acts in Gaza.

Several countries and international organizations have backed South Africa in its case, while Israel has received the backing of the United States, its main weapons supplier and close ally.

Several global entities, including Human Rights Watch, have determined that Israel is engaging in war crimes in Gaza.

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