



Germany
Official Recognition of Herero and Nama Genocide

On May 28, after more than five years of negotiations, a deal has been struck between Namibian and German delegations: The German government officially recognizes the cruel colonial-era atrocities in modern-day Namibia as genocide, in a quest to try and come to terms with their colonial history which left thousands of members of the Herero and Nama communities dead.

In a “gesture of reconciliation,” rather than legally binding reparations, 1.1 billion Euro is set to be spent over the next three decades to support existing “reconstruction and development” projects, the German Foreign Ministry said. Foreign minister Heiko Maas stated the deal aimed at finding “a common path to genuine reconciliation in memory of the victims.”

At the onset of the 20th century, the Herero population lost around 80% and the Nama community approximately 50% of its members at the hands of German colonizers in what was then-called German South West Africa.

While the acknowledgement was met with praise, it was also severely criticized by way of insufficiency. “That’s a black cat in the bag instead of reparations for a crime against humanity,” Herero chief Vekuii Rukoro told Reuters news agency, describing the accord as “an insult.”

Members of the Herero and Nama communities remain critical, saying that it is impossible to ensure the money will benefit all of them. The communities are fractured and only some representatives participated in the negotiations where others were left out.

VICTORIA BECKER

United Kingdom
Modern Slavery on the Rise

7,779. This startling number stands for the modern slavery crimes committed in the United Kingdom between March 2019 and 2020—officially. But slavery is not staging a comeback—it never ceased to exist. From human trafficking to forced labor, from involuntary servitude to sexual exploitation, to forced marriage—it hides in plain sight.

“There is still a general lack of awareness of modern slavery, which could involve as many as 100,000 people in the UK alone,” Justine Currell, Executive Director of Unseen, a British charity working to “stamp out modern slavery,” told The Guardian in April 2021. The pandemic has perpetuated that tendency. With fewer faces out in the public—and those out and about covered in safety gears—the signs of slavery remain difficult to spot, warns Unseen UK.

The UK Government identifies clandestine cannabis farms as prominent sites of enslavement.

“The plants were more valuable than my life,” recalled one of the victims, a Vietnamese boy smuggled into the country at the mere age of 16. Held in darkness and solitude, he tried to escape but got caught and was threatened to get killed, he told The Guardian in 2019. Following a police raid, the boy was rescued—but not liberated. Instead, the teenager succumbed to the court system that “treated him as a criminal rather than a victim.”

Unseen’s Annual Assessment discovered that compared to 2019, last year saw a 95% surge of modern slavery cases occurring on the United Kingdom’s cannabis farms. In April 2021, The Times reported that Albanian nationals were arrested in connection to running a farm in Brierley Hill, West Midlands. The group posed as victims, not ringleaders of the farming scheme, trying to take advantage of the victim-protection system—a “really contentious” fraud method, the National Crime Agency (NCA) comments.

AGNIESZKA GRZY

Iraq
Deadly Attacks on Activists and Election Boycott

October 2019 marked the start of mass anti-government protests taking place all over Iraq. Demonstrators have taken to the streets to express their anger at staggering levels of corruption, high unemployment rates, dismal public services and foreign interference.

Mainly young and from a plethora of societal backgrounds, people want to remove the post-2003 political system run by a narrow elite that is incapable of providing living standards even though Iraq holds vast oil resources.

Elections are set for October this year, in response to the civic demands, but few are hopeful this will bring the desired change. 25-year-old demonstrator Hussein told France24 that “anyone who runs as a free candidate will be killed.”

The BBC describes the uprisings as the “largest and bloodiest” since the US-led invasion in 2003, leaving thousands injured, abducted, or dead. In late 2020, Human Rights Watch reported excessive violence against protestors and “at least” 560 dead. Authorities routinely fail to identify and hold perpetrators of the killings accountable which in turn leads to more protest.

Recent clashes in late May left two dead and many more injured. Among them was anti-government campaigner Ihab al-Wazni whose death inspired the Al-Beit Al-Wata movement—The National Bloc, said to boycott the elections. 17 more groups have joined them so far.

“The people are frustrated,” communist leader Raid Fahmi says. “If the doors of democracy and free, transparent elections close, this could lead to a new wave of violence,” he adds, speaking to AFP.

VICTORIA BECKER