

# Lothar von Trotha's Extermination Order (October 2, 1904)

## Abstract

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This declaration by Lothar von Trotha (1848–1920), the commander of the German forces in Southwest Africa, was sent to the Herero during the Herero Wars (1904–1908). Trotha had previously led campaigns against rebels in East Africa, and against Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion. In Germany the order resulted in a public outcry, and it was officially rescinded by Wilhelm II; however, the Herero had been decimated, with an estimated 80% of their population killed, and the rest imprisoned in forced labor camps, where many more died of disease, malnutrition, and overwork. In 2021, the German government officially recognized these actions as genocide.

## Source

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Osombo-Windhuk, Oct. 2, 1904

I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero people. The Hereros are German subjects no longer. They have murdered, stolen, cut off the ears and noses and other body parts of wounded soldiers, and now they are too cowardly to want to fight any longer. I say to the people: whoever delivers captains [chiefs] to my outposts shall receive 1,000 marks, and whoever brings Samuel Maherero shall receive 5,000 marks. The Herero people must now leave the country. If the people refuse, I shall force them with the *Groot Rohr* [Cape Dutch: cannon].

Any Herero found within the German frontier, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I spare neither women nor children—I drive them back to their people or I will fire upon them. Such are my words to the Herero people.

The General of the Great and Powerful German Kaiser

This proclamation is to be read to the troops at rollcall, with the addition that the unit that catches a captain will also receive the appropriate reward, and that the shooting at women and children is to be understood as shooting above their heads, so as to force them to flee. I assume with certainty that this proclamation will result in no more male prisoners being taken but will not degenerate into atrocities against women and children. The latter will run away if one shoots at them twice. The troops will remain mindful of the good reputation of the German soldier.

Source of original German text: Bundesarchiv Berlin: R 1001/2089, Bl. 7. reprinted in Horst Gründer, “... da und dort ein junges Deutschland gründen.” *Rassismus, Kolonien und kolonialer Gedanke vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1999, pp. 152–153.

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