

Joint press release from: AfricAvenir International, Berliner entwicklungspolitischer Ratschlag (BER), Berlin Postkolonial (BePo), Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD), Paulo Freire Institut (PFI), Projekt „Unterm Teppich?“ (PUT), Tanzania-Network.de (TNW) und Werkstatt der Kulturen (WdK)

Press release

Wednesday, May 20th 2009

### **Further street renamings will be necessary**

#### **Alliance of civil rights organizations welcomes the renaming of Berlin-Kreuzberg's *Gröbenufer* to *May-Ayim-Ufer***

An alliance of civil rights organizations welcomes the forthcoming renaming of *Gröbenufer* to *May-Ayim-Ufer*. Next Wednesday (27.05.09, around 6 p.m., public meeting) the local assembly (Bezirksverordnetenversammlung/BVV) of Berlin's Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district will reach a final decision regarding the corresponding proposal by the Green Party. After reaching a clear majority for the proposal two weeks ago in the meeting of the district's board for culture, its acceptance is to be expected.

“This is a breakthrough. It is the first time in Berlin that a street with a colonial reference is going to be renamed”, comments Armin Massing of BER. Philippa Ebéné, director of the WdK adds: “This is good news, but it can only be a beginning”. Eight other streets in Berlin are still named after colonial criminals, such as *Wissmannstraße* in Neukölln or *Petersallee* in Wedding. “And street names which incorporate a racist term, like the so-called *Mohrenstraße*, urgently need to be renamed, also”, claims Ulrike Hamann from PUT.

The alliance of civil rights organizations has repeatedly requested a critical examination of German colonialism and its vestiges in public space for some time. The proposal made to the BVV is based on a dossier written by this alliance. The initiators are hoping that the renaming of the Kreuzberg waterfront *Gröbenufer* will be a starting point for an extensive examination of the colonial past. Rosa Hoppe from PFI explains that “education in schools is an important factor for the politics of remembrance of the whole society.” Even now, Germany's colonial past is not recognised as a major issue in German schools.

Otto Friedrich von der Gröben (1656-1728), who was honoured with the street name in 1895, is considered the “pioneer” of German colonialism. He was the leader of a marine-expedition of Brandenburg's “Great Elector” participated in the lucrative Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Von der Gröben founded the fortress *Großfriedrichsburg* in the region now known as Ghana. From here an estimated 30.000 enslaved Africans were shipped to the Caribbean and Europe under the most gruesome of conditions. One out of ten people did not even survive the journey to their destination. “From a moral-ethical point of view this crime against humanity could even then only be justified with racist arguments”, claims Christian Kopp from BePo.

The internationally renowned Afro-German poetess, educationist and inhabitant of Kreuzberg, May Ayim (1960-1996), who fought against ongoing racism in Germany and was active in the women's movement, continuously highlighted Germany's forgotten colonial past. “This renaming also challenges people to deal with the close connection between colonialism and racism”, says Luise Steinwachs of TNW. “The renaming of *Gröbenufer* into *May-Ayim-Ufer* will not make the topic of colonialism disappear from the map”, emphasizes Joshua Kwesi Aikins from ISD, “but rather it provides a change of perspective in remembrance.”

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