

Dr. Dominique EYIDI

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Text for the tribute to Mr. Joseph EKWE BILE – Berlin, April 21. 2022

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

Let me introduce myself: my name is Dominique EYIDI. I was born in Cameroon from Nicolas EYIDI and Grace EYANGO EKWE, the oldest living daughter of Joseph EKWE BILE whom we celebrate today. I am one of his twenty grandchildren. I live in France where I work as a materials scientist.

To my regret, I cannot be physically with you today due to a long-planned trip to Cameroon. It is a tremendous honour for my family to know that a plaque in memory of my grandfather Joseph EKWE BILE will be unveiled today April 21, 2022 in Berlin as a tribute to him for his contribution to the emancipation of Blacks in Germany and around the world during the colonial era.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Robbie AITKEN from Sheffield Hallam University and to Professor Eve ROSENHAFT from Liverpool University, whose high quality research has been decisive to provide meaningful information about Black people's history in Germany in the period 1884 - 1960, including my grandfather's. Thank you so much, Professor AITKEN, for having told me about this tribute, and for the considerable energy and passion you invest in your research activities regarding Joseph EKWE BILE's biography and other's.

I would like to address my heartfelt thanks to all the associations working to publicize the history of Blacks in Germany, and which have made it possible to

hold this day of homage, especially Dekoloniale. Thank you so much, Mrs. Anna YEBOAH, for allowing me to say those words through your voice.

Last but not least, I extend my warmest thanks to the City of Berlin represented by Dr. Christine REGUS, for organizing this unique event.

When Joseph EKWE BILE arrived in Germany in 1912, he was 20; when he left Europe to return to Cameroon in 1935, he had, in turn, been a student, soldier, theater and film actor, defender of oppressed blacks, and communist activist. Back to Douala in 1935, a sharp change took place within him. He moved from the public man who was almost constantly in the limelight for 23 years in Europe, to become a discrete entrepreneur, architect, loving father and generous head of family. Solidly anchored in his home in Bonamikengué, Akwa, Douala, he permanently housed around thirty people in addition to his close family!

What happened to Gertrud, the daughter he and Mrs. Helene LÜCKE had here in Berlin in 1929? This is a question I will seek to resolve in the coming months.

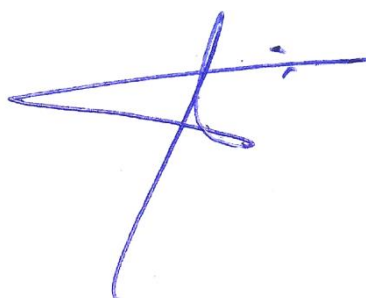
Back to Douala, Joseph EKWE BILE was able to find his way in a tense context of anti-colonial struggles all over Africa, where many leaders were ferociously hunted down, and often physically eliminated, like Patrice LUMUMBA in Congo and Ruben UM NYOBE in Cameroon, among others. Joseph EKWE BILE had chosen to spend what would be the last part of his life taking the greatest care of his family, of which he had been deprived for many years. But he was not completely politically inactive then: till the end, he would be a member of political associations that worked in the shadows.

Alongside other Blacks who lived in Europe during the colonial era, Joseph EKWE BILE showed the way for million individuals, including myself. He proved that it was and still is possible, in a sometimes extremely hostile environment, to actively promote the ideals of social justice, to shine and rise through his almost endless energy, his astounding eclecticism, his incredible audacity, and his constant resilience.

When Joseph EKWE BILE passed away in Douala at the beginning of the dry season in 1959, my mother had just turned 18; it was only a few months before the official independence of Cameroon. My mother is now almost 81 years old. Throughout her life, she also has shown much resilience. She is very proud of her father, a father she would simply describe as very sensitive and emotional.

Thank you for your attention.

Have a wonderful afternoon!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, sweeping tail that curves upwards and to the right.

Dominique EYIDI