

Kenya anti-graft watchdog boss' resignation setback for government - newspaper
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The government may not be involved in the business of the Transparency International's Kenyan Chapter, but the resignation of its director on Friday [15 April, as published], will certainly be seen in some quarters as yet another setback in the fight against corruption. Ms Gladwell Otieno is said to have quit her position following disagreements with the board over her handling of allegations of high-level graft.

It will be recalled that not long ago, Ms Otieno was embroiled in a bitter exchange with senior officials in the Kibaki administration, following TI Kenya's allegation that a cabinet minister had stashed away in a foreign account 750m shillings, believed to have been skimmed off from corrupt deals. The government put Ms Otieno under intense pressure to name the minister, but support for TI Kenya came from another vocal critic, British High Commissioner Edward Clay, who argued that the government should investigate instead of trying to crucify a whistle blower.

Earlier, Ms Otieno was in another bitter public row, when she rejected payment for her participation in an anti-graft committee under the Justice Ministry, she felt had done pretty little. And it's her attempt to donate the "tainted" money to charity that earned her rebuke from even the first lady [Lucy Kibaki].

Therefore, at the level of public perception, Ms Otieno's departure will be seen as further evidence of how the forces around the Kibaki government are determined to scatter those keen to fight high level graft. And this has come at a time when the government has just concluded a consultative meeting with donors, who were far from convinced that enough is being done to combat corruption.

Also complicating matters even more for the government is the fact Ms Otieno's own predecessor, Mr John Githongo, only about two months ago resigned as the permanent secretary for governance and ethics, frustrated at the lack of support in his anti-corruption campaign. The mere fact that this key office in the government's often stated war on graft remains vacant two months later, is a negative signal, indeed.

And confirmation of the government's growing reluctance to take the bull of corruption by the horns can be gleaned from Justice and Constitutional Affairs minister Kiraitu Murungi's assertion that when the decision is made to replace Mr Githongo, his successor will not wield as much power as he did.

It is the growing public feeling that the government appears to be only paying lip service to the anti-graft campaign that is worrisome. After all, the Judge Aaron Ringera-led Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission doesn't not appear to have made any ground in several months.

But even more damning is the fact that people in the government who have been named in scandals have stayed put, when they should have stepped aside for thorough investigations to be carried out. The government can only redeem its fading image by baring its claws to pluck out graft and punish all the culprits.

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