

**Githongo Breaks His Silence Over Graft**  
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Former Ethics and Governance Permanent Secretary John Githongo has finally broken his silence to talk about grand corruption.

Speaking in Germany, Githongo told the world that Africa's biggest let-down in the war against corruption was "its sense of respect and deference to the elderly".

"This has not served us well in the political realm and has contributed to the versatility of embedded corruption networks since independence from colonial rule," he said.

Githongo, who has been nicknamed the "high priest of good governance" by the BBC, spoke in Berlin on Tuesday evening after being awarded a prestigious international anti-corruption award by German President Horst Kohler.

As camera flashes illuminated his face, Githongo, whose resignation dealt a blow to the Narc government's credibility in its commitment to fighting corruption, declared he was accepting the award on behalf of the "People of Kenya".

He said he was notified he had won the award while still serving in government.

"This prize I am being awarded today most correctly belongs to the Kenyan people, Kenyan civil society and the Kenyan media whose persistence and consistency against the grand corruption that has impoverished them is one of the most inspiring things happening in Kenya today," said Githongo moments before flying to his new home in Britain.

Githongo has kept a studious silence since his sudden resignation in February. In his speech, he reflected on this: "While I am deeply honoured to have been chosen to serve my country in that important capacity, after two eventful years I had come to the conclusion that it was no longer possible for me to continue in the service."

He marvelled at the way the web of corruption establishes links traversing all sectors of the society, including the political, economic and security sub-sectors.

The award took place as President Kibaki and his ministers met with donors in Nairobi to discuss the progress so far made towards economic growth.

The two-day session, which started on Monday, ended with an action plan outlining more conditions for the Government to fulfil in order for the aid taps to be opened.

Githongo spoke of the frustrations in fighting corruption, but concluded optimistically that the war would be won. "This is a war that will have its casualties; and although it continues to hold its hostages, it will eventually be won by the African people."

Kohler's exhilaration could be discerned in the good words he had for Githongo and his co-winner of the German Africa 2004 Award, Dr Paul Fokam of Cameroon.

"Paul Fokam and John Githongo represent the new Africa. Their work gives us and many others hope. They are living proof that Africa is not a hopeless cause," he said.

Kohler said Githongo's surprise resignation while on an official trip abroad had opened the eyes of the world to level of corruption in Kenya.

"Quitting his post was the only way he saw of drawing attention to the true state of affairs. Mr Githongo, the international community has got the message. The ball is still in the Kenyan government's court to fight corruption with determination," President Kohler said.

"Zero tolerance must not become an empty promise used to placate international donors. Concrete measures must be taken to increase the confidence of the Kenyan people and the international community in the Kenyan government," he added.

Githongo also spoke of the lessons he has learned.

"For me the most profound realisation has been that embedded corruption networks that bring together politicians, businessmen-brokers, bureaucrats and security sector officials can thrive in the shadows as cohesive albeit amorphous entities reshaping the economic destiny of African nations, as a result of the size and scale of their illicit transactions; transactions that can entrap entire sections of the political elite. It is thus that the dreams of ordinary African citizens are stolen."

Githongo, a former journalist who spent years investigating Kenya's rampant culture of bribery and fraud, was lauded as Kibaki's best choice as his adviser on corruption.

He reported directly to the President and his appointment earned him the name "anti-graft czar".

But when he quit in February, he took away a measure of credibility in the Government's commitment to fight graft. It also reinforced perceptions that Kibaki, by failing to act on top officials linked to corruption, had lost the fire to fight emerging corruption.

In his speech, Githongo appeared to allude to a link between 'new' corruption and the struggle by a certain political class to stockpile money to sustain power.

"The persistence of patronage-driven resource allocation decisions can lead to fundamental societal changes such as generational disillusionment - where, as a culture of impunity sets in, successive generations begin to believe that graft is the only way forward in life."

"In this environment, corruption becomes easier to justify on the basis of its need to fund politics, because one ethnic elite feels it needs the fire to fight the fire of the corruptly accumulated financial resources of the previous elite and because, put quite simply, it has worked for those who have come before."

" This leads to fundamental contradictions that can make a mockery of anti-corruption efforts as the claimed political realities necessitate graft on scales that mean basic economic objectives are relegated in official decision-making."

He noted that grand corruption and looting, which holds African economies back, could not take place without the skilled facilitation of professionals in the West - bankers and lawyers in particular - who are integral to the complicated transactions

via which the most serious cases of corruption are perpetrated.

"The challenge for us in Africa, over the coming decade, is to dismantle these embedded corruption networks that have survived the process of democratisation and continue to hold entire systems of procurement in Africa hostage, especially in the areas of energy, communications and security," he concluded.

Before he resigned, Githongo was involved in the pursuit of an estimated Sh70 billion stashed abroad in secret accounts by top personalities linked to corrupt deals in previous government.

On his last assignment, he was on the way home from a meeting with Kroll Associates, the private international firm contracted to trace the hidden billions.

He was also at the centre of investigations into the Sh7 billion Anglo Leasing scam, where "phantom" recipients of contracts, upfront payments by Treasury, were secretly wired back to the Central Bank from overseas.