

Corruption 'returns' to Kenya
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Nairobi - Time is running out for the Kenyan government to prove its commitment to the fight against corruption, says Kenya's anti-graft czar John Githongo.

Despite a large number of speeches by President Mwai Kibaki about how there will be "no sacred cows" in the fight against graft, and the setting up of one new anti-corruption body after another, not much seems to be happening.

"The next six months will test our collective political will to fight corruption," Governance and Ethics Secretary John Githongo said in Nairobi over the weekend.

Githongo, the former head of the Kenya division of the global anti-graft organisation Transparency International (TI), was recruited to Kibaki's government to show the president meant business.

He has managed to remain in the president's office, in spite of several alleged attempts to have him removed or sidelined. A favourite with western donors, he has not made many friends in the power apparatus in Nairobi.

Githongo said history has shown that governments brought to power democratically after a long period of authoritarian rule (such as the one in Kenya), have 18 to 24 months to make some real changes to deal with corruption.

Kenya 'managed to make the necessary changes'

He said that Kenya had managed to make the necessary legislative changes to fight corruption, and various commissions and task forces had almost all finished their work.

Now, said Githongo, it is a matter of "political will from the top to the bottom".

Among other things, he proposed that wealth declaration forms for ministers and other senior government officials, initiated by president Kibaki, should be made official, as in developed countries. The forms are currently only available to certain anti-corruption officials.

Kibaki was elected 18 months ago on an anti-corruption platform, and many Kenyans thought they would finally see a cleaned-up Kenya.

During the 24-year long regime of Daniel Arap Moi, which ended in 2002, large-scale state corruption among senior politicians was routine and many of them ended up sitting on vast fortunes, while the majority of Kenyans lived below the poverty line.

Now, most observers agree, grand corruption has returned to Kenya.

The eyes of the media and other monitors were opened a few months ago when it came to light that a project worth \$10m for purchasing passport-issuing equipment

was expanded into costing \$34.2m and the tender was awarded to a French firm without competitive bidding.

The British High Commissioner to Kenya, Edward Clay, raised the level of criticism drastically when he said in July that corrupt ministers in the governments were "arrogant, greedy, ate like gluttons and vomited all over the donors shoes".

Clay said in his speech, which went down like a lead balloon in Kenyan society, that estimates show corruption make up eight percent of Kenya's GDP.

The High Commissioner added that "the new corruption entered into by this government may be worth around \$188m, and continuation of old corruption inherited from the last government might be \$997m.

Clay's message, although not his wording, was echoed by several other donors, and one Kenyan newspaper called Clay "our national hero".

"The president will never be able to root out corruption in this government. Most of the people around him are kikuyu (Kenya's main tribe) like him, and he can never fight them. They are his own people," said Julius, a driver in Nairobi, voicing the opinion of many Kenyans. - Sapa-dpa