

## **Anti-bribery chief gives up in land of greased palms FROM XAN RICE IN NAIROBI**

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### **Presidential adviser brought in to clean up the system despairs over graft at the top**

THIS was not supposed to happen. When the Kenyan people elected a new Government two years ago, they were voting for an end to corruption; of the daily ritual of bribery and extortion that swelled civil servants' pockets and looted the State.

Or so they thought. On Monday John Githongo, the high-profile head of Kenya's anti-corruption drive and a personal adviser to President Kibaki, quit his job suddenly. Angry, frustrated and scared at the extent of the graft that he had uncovered, Mr Githongo tendered his resignation from London.

In an instant, the Government's credibility was dented. Donors panicked. The United States suspended \$2.5 million (£1.3 million) in anti-corruption aid. Moreover, ordinary Kenyans — the often dirt-poor wananchi — have had their worst fear confirmed: in Kenya, old habits die hard.

Like most Kenyans, Evans Imbuka, 29, a security guard in Nairobi, keeps a close watch on politics. He is disheartened but not surprised by what has happened. "Corruption started with the first President Kenyatta, and then President Moi made things even worse," he said. "So this Government is just carrying on the trend."

Much of the malice that accompanied graft in the Moi years has disappeared, he said, but still palms need to be greased. "If I go to the police station to report an incident, I will have to pay them just to listen to me," Mr Imbuka, who earns about £35 a month, said.

It was hoped that by tackling corruption at the top, all this would change. Mr Githongo, 39, was headhunted from Transparency International, an organisation that monitors corruption, and his appointment as Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics in the President's office was seen as sign that the bad days were over. For a while all seemed well. Salaries of many public servants, such as the police, were increased and the day-to-day corruption tailed off. Signs at the airport and most government offices declared "Don't pay a bribe" and most people did not.

Corruption at government level was still reported, but as long as Mr Githongo — a British-born graduate of the University of Wales — was in office, they were prepared to believe that the regime was trying to move away from the past.

"For a while the police, transport officials and other civil servants held back on corruption, but that period soon passed," Lynne Muthoni Wanyeki, a prominent political columnist, said. "They saw what their superiors had not changed and decided they could get away with it as well."

Political experts say that Mr Githongo had witnessed the extent of corruption at the highest levels of parliament and realised that he was powerless to stop it. In working closely with Kroll, the risk consulting company, to try to recover millions of dollars looted from Kenya under the Moi and present regimes, he also made enemies. Gladwell Otieno, the head of Transparency International, said that Mr Githongo was "in great personal danger" at the time of his resignation. Sir Edward Clay, the British

High Commissioner and one of the administration's ardent critics, said last week that he had given the Government 20 dossiers detailing dubious tenders, particularly in defence and security procurement. Some senior government ministers accused him of trying to protect British business interests and of breaching diplomatic protocol.