

# Ex-diplomat, church official, resigns as head of Kenya truth body

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Nairobi, November 2 (ENI)--Bethuel Kiplagat, the head of Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and a former national church figure, has resigned after mounting pressure on him to step down following allegations of corruption against him.

"In order to allow the tribunal to carry out its mandate, I am, therefore, as of today, stepping aside from my day to day responsibilities at the TJRC," Kiplagat said in a statement issued in Nairobi on 2 November.

Kiplagat's statement came two days after the chief justice named a tribunal to investigate corruption allegations levelled against him.

The truth commission was set up to investigate factors that led to fierce inter-ethnic fighting and the deaths of about 1300 people after disputed election results in December 2007.

A former deputy general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, Kiplagat has been involved in World Council of Churches peace efforts in Africa. He served as Kenya's ambassador to France in 1978, and was envoy to Britain from 1981 to 1983.

Kiplagat was appointed by President Mwai Kibaki in July 2009 to lead the commission, which was tasked with uncovering responsibilities for historical injustices, political assassinations and the plundering of national resources since Kenya's independence in 1963.

Civil society groups then started calling for his resignation alleging he was tainted by the same injustices he was supposed to investigate.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town and chairperson of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, had in February urged Kiplagat to stand down.

Civil society groups said Kiplagat was a top foreign ministry official during the rule of former president Daniel arap Moi, when the army massacred Somali Muslims in northern Kenya in 1984. He was also an official there when his superior, the then foreign minister Robert Ouko was killed.

"I still believe that we must uphold the constitutional right of every Kenyan to be considered innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law," Kiplagat said in his statement.

Church leaders had prayed with Kiplagat as the pressure grew on the former diplomat.

"I visited him. He was a deeply troubled man, but his conscience was very clean," the Rev. David Gathanju, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa told ENInews. Gathanju had earlier in the year also called on Kiplagat to stand down.