

Kenya Police News

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President Mwai Kibaki's announcement this week that the country's former Police Commissioner Major General Hussein Ali would be replaced at the helm of the force and re-deployed to the Postal Corporation of Kenya has not been welcomed. (Ali's former deputy, Lawrence Mwandime, has been given a post in the ministry of livestock development.) Ali, a retired army general, headed the Kenya Police, responsible for such general police matters as criminal investigations and traffic control; the Administration Police takes charge of security for ministers, members of parliament and other top government officials. For many Kenyans still recovering from the violence that saw as many as 1,300 people murdered, over 3,000 women raped and over 300,000 people displaced, the move is being seen as an evasion of justice. The changes have largely been dismissed as a way to avoid prosecutions rather than a 'departure from the culture of impunity rule' in Kenya. A number of lobby groups welcomed Ali's removal, but they strongly cautioned that further changes remain urgent. Speaking to IPS, Hassan Omar, vice chairman of the official rights watchdog mandated by the constitution, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, said that Ali's removal should be a starting point to comprehensive reforms in the force. "We trust the changes will set the pace for a rebuilding of public confidence in the police and create the necessary momentum for reforms," he said but cautioned that this must be quickly followed with implementation of the recommendations of a Police Reforms Task Force headed by retired Judge Philip Ransley which called for an overhaul of the entire police force structure. Omar called on Kenyans to ensure that the government fulfils its promise to reform the police force in totality. The non-government Kenya Human Rights Commission, headed by Muthoni Wanyeki, also criticised the reassignments. Wanyeki called on the president to be careful with the issue of reforms bearing in mind that the country is waiting to see all senior officers of the force sent home. "The writing is clearly on the wall that the president should stop playing games with the reforms issue as the country has already agreed that all senior police officers should be sent home to pave way for fresh leadership in the police force," Wanyeki said. The Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS), which includes members of the police force, also dismissed the changes as a sham and public relations exercise. UCKS Secretary General Tom Odege castigated the president, saying that the replacement of only one person cannot convince that the government is focused on reforming the police force. "One person can not bring the required change in the police. Reforms in the force are not an act of performing miracles but a practical Kenyan-backed process," he asserted.