

**Tanzanian President Denies US Ambassador's 2006 Report Seen On Wikileaks
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DAR ES-SALAAM, Sept 6 (BERNAMA-NNN-DAILY NEWS) -- The Tanzanian president's office has come out strongly to refute claims levelled against President Jakaya Kikwete by former United States Ambassador to Tanzania Michael Retzer in top secret messages to the US State Department in 2006.

In recorded cable messages which were intercepted by whistleblower website WikiLeaks, the ambassador is reported to have said that President Kikwete had accepted gifts from the owner of the Kempinski Hotel chain, Ali Albwardy, who is a citizen of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The diplomat is reported to have also described the gifts as bribes.

When contacted on the matter, a spokesperson with the US Embassy in Dar es Salaam said through an SMS: "We have no comment on Wikileaks stories."

On Monday, the State House here called the former ambassador to substantiate the claims, tore apart the allegations and termed them as barefaced falsehood, innuendos and "lazy malicious gossip" aimed at tarnishing the name and the good image of the president.

"It is unfortunate and highly disappointing that an ambassador worth his name could engage in this kind of lazy gossip," the Director of Presidential Communications, Salva Rweyemamu, told journalists in Dar es Salaam.

The information, according to Retzer, came from a conversation he had with the Manager and Publicity Director of the former Dar es Salaam-based Kilimanjaro-Kempinski Hotel, Lisa Pile, who, however, said in an e-mail communication on Sunday that the diplomat's claims were absolutely not true, a complete load of rubbish and an absolute defamation of her personal character.

According to the cable report, the diplomat said Albwardy had flown Kikwete (who was then the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation) to London for a subsidised shopping expedition where he bought him five Saville Row suits.

Retzer is further reported to have said that President Kikwete had also accepted a US\$1 million campaign contribution to his party in 2005 and subsequently given the hotel chain "business favours" as a result.

"We would like to state categorically that there has never been a time when the President received gifts from Ali Albwardy. This is definitely an outrageous claim and if there is evidence to the contrary, we would like to challenge Mr Albwardy to produce it publicly," said Rweyemamu.

"There has never been a time, ever, when Mr Kikwete, during his time as Foreign Minister or currently as President of the United Republic of Tanzania, was flown by anybody to London on a subsidised shopping expedition to buy five suits.

All his travels to London or any other places in the world have been duty assignments paid for by the Government of Tanzania.

"During his entire life, as Foreign Minister or as President, Mr Kikwete has never met in London with Mr Ali Albwardy".

Rweyemamu further said that the president was not responsible for either raising or receiving campaign funds for CCM during the 2005 general elections and that he was simply the party's flag bearer.

"But the president maintains that Kempinski Kilimanjaro Hotel was neither asked nor contributed a single cent towards CCM campaigns. Therefore the allegations that it contributed one US\$1 million for that matter are baseless and unfounded," he said.

In the cables, Retzer had also painted a picture that the possession of the Kilimanjaro Hotel by Kempinski Hotels and permission to construct two new hotels seemed like a 'favour' from President Kikwete.

However, Rweyemamu pointed out that the government authorisation for possessing the Kilimanjaro Hotel by Kempinski Hotels and the subsequent permission to Kempinski to build two new hotels -- one on the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater and another on the Serengeti plains overlooking the main animal migration routes -- were issued by the Third Phase Government and not by President Kikwete's administration.

"In fact, President Kikwete declined to grant permission to Kempinski Hotels to build on the Ngorongoro Crater on the strength of environmental concerns. How come that the President who has been offered so many favours such as suits and election money, took this principled position?" he queried.

Rweyemamu also described as a lie, claims that President Kikwete had frequented Kilimanjaro Kempinski Hotel in his personal capacity saying the records were very clear -- the President has never ever visited that hotel except when on official duties or when he has escorted official state guests.

"It is unfortunate that the distinguished ambassador would transmit such lies. The Office of the President takes strong exception to such a behaviour which seeks to tarnish the name and person of the President," he said.

Retzer is also reported to have claimed that on Oct 18, 2006, over dinner, an Indian/South Asian man described as a business associate of Ali Albwardy, briefly took Pile from the table for a conversation in Kiswahili, where he noted that he was not sure what was said, but that "Kikwete's name came up several times".

But Pile noted in her e-mail: "I have never spoken Swahili and have never had private access to a President of Tanzania or any world President."

She said she believed she was owed an apology for such misrepresentation of both her personal name and her professionalism.

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