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Fri 11 May 07 | 15:43 GMT

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World

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Energy & Oil

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Currencies

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S.Africa seeks more women, non-white judges

Fri 11 May 2007, 10:43 GMT

CAPE TOWN (Reuters) - South Africa's judiciary has started to fast-track women for judges' jobs, which are still dominated by white males, the nation's top judge told parliament on Friday. [-] Text [+]

Constitutional Court Chief Judge Pius Langa said the programme was aimed at making South Africa's courtrooms more reflective of the country's overall population.

"We are sparing no effort to produce a judiciary that is effective, competent and fully transformed, not only in terms of race and gender, but also in terms of being in tune with the values of the constitution," Langa said.



Langa said that since 2004 there have been 206 appointments to the bench including 83 white males, 15 black females, 61 black males, 11 black females, 6 coloured (mixed-race) males, 6 coloured females; 21 Indian males and 3 Indian females.

Critics have often accused South Africa's judiciary, which under apartheid was in charge of implementing racist laws, with failing to keep pace with the country's democratic transformation.

Many white judges -- who are appointed for life -- were allowed to remain on the bench following the first democratic elections in 1994 as part of a "sunset clause" aimed at maintaining continuity of South Africa's civil service.

Langa said vestiges of racism and sexism in the judiciary were being dealt with and that part of the transformation push was an effort to attract women to the bench through a fast-tracking initiative.

"Lately we have started a project to fast-track the qualifications of women practitioners. ... The project intends to assist these women to be ready for appointment as acting judges, and obviously with a view to them being judges in future," Langa said.

Langa said the first intake of 22 women will participate in an intensive programme, starting early next month, and that the programme would focus on judicial training and education, including race and gender sensitivity.

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