

Sheriffs' code of conduct updated, brought into line with constitution

Staff Writer

THE COUNTRY'S sheriffs are now operating under an updated code of conduct, Department of Justice and Constitutional Development spokesman Mthunzi Mhaga said yesterday.

"The Sheriff's Code was last updated in 1990 when the Sheriff's Act was amended. This was 23 years ago. This resulted in the Sheriff's Code not being in line with the constitutional imperatives of our democratic dispensation," Mhaga said.

Under the new code, sheriffs are required to execute court orders without delay and must serve members of the public in the official language in which they are addressed.

A person may not act as sheriff in any matter in which he or she has an interest.

Mhaga said there was "a very

important provision, namely that trust money must be paid out to the person entitled thereto without avoidable delay."

"The conduct of the sheriff or deputy sheriff plays a big part in how people perceive the law and the legal system," he said.

"If people view the law and the justice system as hostile, negative and ineffective, there will be no respect for the rule of law.

"All of our people must be able to have confidence in the justice system and have the belief that the system will protect their rights and that they will be treated fairly and equally."

The SA Sheriff's Society and the SA National Association of Progressive Sheriffs have endorsed the code, which was effective from the beginning of the month.

Mhaga said transformation

of the sheriff's profession remained a priority for the Justice Department.

Before 1994 there were 465 sheriffs, 44 of whom were Africans, five coloured and two Indian. Last year there were 348 permanent sheriffs, 171 of whom were white, 128 African, 26 Indian and 23 coloured (7 percent).

Women represented 77 (22 percent) of the total and men 271 (78 percent).

This resulted in a 6,73 percent increase of black persons (Africans, Indians and coloureds) in the profession.

Mhaga said 18 new sheriffs were appointed last month - 11 of them African. Among the 18, six were women.

The newly-appointed sheriffs brought the number of permanent sheriffs operating in the country to 362 from 348, he said.