

High Courts to commemorate centenary of women in legal practice

The High Courts in both Pretoria and Johannesburg will this week hold ceremonial sittings to commemorate the centenary of the Women Legal Practice Act of 1923.



Image source: Getty Images

“Prior to the Act the courts had ruled, in *Schlesin v Incorporated Law Society* 1909 TS 363 and *Incorporated Law Society v Wookey* 1912 AD 623 that women were not included as ‘persons’ who could be admitted to legal practice,” the Office of the Chief Justice said on Sunday.

The Act expressly opened the door to women by decreeing that:

“ Women shall be entitled to be admitted to practice and to be enrolled as advocates, attorneys, notaries public or conveyancers in any province of the Union subject to the same terms and conditions as apply to men ”



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Shan Raddiffe 24 Aug 2020



“It did not take long for women to take active steps to become legal practitioners. The first woman to be admitted as an advocate in South Africa was Irene Geffin in 1923. The first woman attorney was Constance Mary Hall, in 1926. For historic apartheid reasons, it took longer for Black women to join the ranks, with Desiree Finca being enrolled as the first Black woman attorney in 1967,” the Office of the Chief Justice said.

For this historic celebratory occasion, Finca, together with direct descendants of Geffin and of Wookey, will attend the sittings as special guests.

Tuesday's occasion is hosted in collaboration with the South African Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges and the 100 more Campaign.

The ceremonial sittings will bring together women from legal practice, legal institutions, and the Judiciary to honour these pioneering women, to reflect on the journey of women in the legal profession and to reaffirm the commitment as a collective to promote the constitutional rights of equality and human dignity.

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