

# Officials sweating it out in high court

**ZELDA VENTER**

zelda.venter@inl.co.za

IT WAS again blazing hot in the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, this week due to non-functional air-conditioners – and for once all parties agreed on one thing: that the heat was simply unbearable.

Several counsel have appeared in court for the past two weeks without their black gowns after judges gave them permission to remove their gowns if they felt the heat was too much.

Among these was Deputy Judge President Aubrey Ledwaba, who told the Pretoria News that appearing in court without a robe did not look good for the decorum of the court. However, he had no choice but to give them this option as the heat was unbearable due to non-working air-conditioners.

“I fear for those who have health problems. Many of my colleagues say they cannot work under these conditions,” Judge Ledwaba said.

He also voiced his dissatisfaction with the situation and said it was



**Deputy Judge President Aubrey Ledwaba in the chambers minus his jacket due to the excessive heat in the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria.**

PICTURE: ZELDA VENTER

extremely difficult to operate under such conditions. “It is simply getting worse by the day,” he said.

Judge Ledwaba said the problem had earlier been brought to the atten-

tion of the Department of Public Works during a normal stakeholder meeting. The department promised to attend to the problem urgently.

According to departmental spokesperson Thami Mchunu, the temperatures were expected to drop soon in the 29 courtrooms.

He said all air-conditioners on the western side of the court, which houses 16 courtrooms, were fully functional. The chiller plant on the eastern side, however, was working with a limited air supply.

“This is due to delays in procuring shaft parts which were delivered on Wednesday. The contractor will be working overnight to finalise repairs to the plant.”

Mchunu added that the department also procured a contractor on a six-month contract to service the air-conditioners at the high court.

Judges, staff and counsel have been complaining since the start of this court term two weeks ago about the sweltering heat.

Many, however, said the air-conditioners had not been working properly for the past nine years.

It is now a common sight to see advocates leaving court with sweat dripping down their brows. Others bring their own fans to court, while some use their court documents to constantly fan themselves.

On Wednesday, the temperature inside courtroom GB – a criminal court – was 33°C at 9.30am.

Deputy chairperson of the Pretoria Bar Council Francois Botes said the air-conditioning at court had been a serious concern for 18 months.

“We are disappointed and frustrated by virtue of the fact that the authorities are ignorant and make no effort to attempt to rectify the problem. The defective air-conditioners impede the effective functioning of the judiciary.”

Botes said it was impossible to dispense proper justice under these circumstances.

“We wear robes in court specifically to respect the decorum of the high court, but without air-conditioning it is simply impossible to conduct a trial under these inhumane conditions.”