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Anger at SA woman trouser 'ban'

Moves by men to stop women wearing trousers in a South African township have been condemned by politicians and civil rights groups.

Earlier this week, a woman in Umlazi township, near Durban, was stripped naked and her shack burnt down.

Men in the township are demanding that all women wear skirts or dresses.

South Africa's Gender and Equality Commission told the BBC that this was the first time something like this had happened in the country.

"It is extreme and the issue around this matter is being investigated by the police," the commission's Mfanozelwe Shoji told the BBC Network Africa programme.

He said it was not uncommon for women to wear trousers in and around Durban.

Correspondents say men in conservative rural communities in southern Africa sometimes harass women for wearing trousers and short skirts.

Conflict of values

Describing the incident on Sunday, he said the men tore off a woman's trousers.

"Unfortunately she did not wear any underpants; and they also burnt the woman's shack where she was living, just because she was wearing trousers," he said.

The incident happened in an area of Umlazi called T section which is a hostelry for men.

"Only men are supposed to stay there - emanating from the apartheid era when people were segregated in terms of areas.

"It's a place where men live from the rural areas so that they can be nearer their work environment."

According to South Africa's Mercury paper, after this a community meeting decided to ban women in the area wearing trousers.

Social anthropologist Prof Anand Singh told the paper the incident was a conflict of values.



It is not unusual for women to wear trousers in South African cities

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"If one looks at South African societies, they are all patriarchal and it is difficult for people who assume authoritative roles in homes to adjust to women assuming their own roles and status within society," he said.

The Gender and Equality Commission and local politicians have condemned the actions.

"I was shocked when I learnt of the incident, because I wear pants myself and am not ashamed to do so. It is also not forbidden by our party," the paper quotes Theresa Nzuzo from the Inkatha Freedom Party as saying.

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