



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

DWS women encouraged to wear idhuku during women`s month

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The Department of Water and Sanitation`s Gender and Disability Mainstreaming Directorate in collaboration with Knowledge Management (KM) Directorate will embrace the power, fights and struggles that the women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 faced for the present women to see and live a better life with new opportunities.

The march took place on 9 August 1956, where more than 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings to protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women. This was recorded as one of the most successful marches which saw women from all parts of the country arriving in Pretoria, some from as far afield as Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

Walker describes the impressive scene thus: "Many of the African women wore traditional dresses, head wraps; others wore the Congress colours – green, black and gold; Indian women were clothed in white saris. Many women had babies on their backs and some domestic workers brought their white employers' children along with them. Throughout the demonstration, the huge crowd displayed discipline and dignity, which was deeply impressive" (Walker 1991:195).

The department wishes to salute and celebrate the contribution that the women made to South Africa's history. All women within the department are encouraged to put on head wraps or scarves (idhuku) every Friday during women`s month, like those liberation struggle heroines who marched to the Union building on 9 August 1956.

Historically, the doek or headscarf was imposed on black women in many colonies by convention or by law as a way to control the sensuality and exoticism that "confused" white men.

The covering of the hair was therefore a tool by which white colonial culture attempted to erase the differences between black women while accentuating the differences between white and black women.

In today's culture the idhuku is a cultural symbol that has grown in style and became one of the most fashionable pieces. Wearing a dhuku today gives an African woman a layer of confidence and strength that the 1956 women fought for.

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