

Female cops to dress up as sex workers

Crackdown on brothels, pimps

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SOME Metro Police officers in Cape Town plan to go undercover and pose as sex workers. They are part of a team of 20 law enforcement officers who make up a team hoping to crack down on the soliciting of women in the Mother City.

The City of Cape Town has raised the ire of the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (Sweat) in its campaign to get sex workers off the city's streets.

JP Smith, the mayoral committee member responsible for safety and security, said Cape Town law enforcers would be visiting brothels and targeting pimps.

As part of this campaign, some women officers from the Metro Police will be swopping their uniforms for more risqué outfits as they engage in sting operations to catch men who pay for sex.

Rudolf Wiltshire, the head of specialised law enforcement services in Cape Town, said 20 staff members were working on the project, 10 of them women who would "take to the streets".

The officers, drawn from permanent Metro Police staff members, were "specifically selected for this function", he said.

They had the right attributes for this kind of work, which required a

good understanding of the social issues of sex workers. They would undergo "dedicated training aimed at enhancing sensitivity in the environments of health and substance abuse, as well as the understanding of safe housing and remedial intervention".

Wiltshire said 112 sex workers had been fined for soliciting to date.

But Sweat, which earlier obtained an interdict to stop authorities repeatedly arresting sex workers, has objected. Angela Andrews, of the Legal Resources Centre, representing Sweat, said the recent arrests had violated the interdict.

Smith said the sex workers were not being arrested under the Sexual Offences Act, but fined under the city's public nuisance bylaw.

"The bylaw is not interdicted," said Smith, adding that the city was acting in good faith and in compliance with the law.

Sweat's Vivienne Lalu said the random arrests of sex workers not only failed to address "real crimes" and "those criminals who capitalise on sex workers", but caused the industry to be driven further underground, and also deprived sex workers of their human rights.

Smith hit back, saying the jury was out on who ultimately had improved the lives of these women more.