



Two teams competing in the National School Moot Court Competition at the Constitutional Court in Joburg.

PICTURE: MURIEL ENGLISH

## Winning teenagers make case in Constitutional Court

MPELETSO MOTOUMI

IT TOOK 350 applications, 280 essays and 16 schools to finally come down to the winning team.

The second National Schools Moot Court Competition took place over the long weekend, with the final round taking place at the Constitutional Court yesterday.

The competition tests participants' knowledge of the constitution, eventually pitting the two final teams against each other in a courtroom drama, where the team members take on the roles of lawyers, applicants and respondents.

"The children who enter are interested in debating and what is going on in the country. And the

topics we choose are relevant," said programme manager Cheryl Botesill.

This year, the theme was "child-headed households", said Botesill. The scenario was of a 15-year-old girl taking care of her two younger siblings after their mother's death, but she is unable to receive a grant because she is under the age of 18.

"The aim is to make them understand, know their rights and duties as well as the values of the constitution," said Botesill.

After a process that started in July with essays and oral presentations, the two finalist teams were Western Cape's Springfield Convent School and Limpopo's Thengwe High School.

Robula Bhebeke and Knowledge Dzumbe then went on to win the competition for Limpopo.

"When we were first told about the competition, I knew I would

It's really changed me and I believe in myself

do well, even though I knew nothing about the law. It was a chance I had to take," said Robula, 14.

The Limpopo pair worked together every morning, between

classes and in the afternoons, and would leave school late only to go home to perform their chores.

"The competition has changed the way I think of myself. I used to be very shy; never asking questions. It has really changed me and I now believe in myself," said Knowledge, 17.

The Grade 11 pupil was encouraged by his teachers to enter because of his good marks.

The two had spent most of their time researching different cases, studying judgments and how the constitution works.

"It was a real eye-opener. I used to be clueless and didn't look at the constitution booklet we had at home, but now I can even take people through it,"

said Robula. The pupil had been eager to enter the competition last year, but she was still in primary school.

She also received the prize for best overall orator.

The judging panel included Constitutional Court Justice Bess Nkabinde and Justice Edwin Cameron.

Justice Nkabinde said the final two teams had given convincing arguments and had presented their cases better than some professional lawyers who appeared before the Bench.

"We all have a responsibility to make sure children are given an opportunity to participate in decision-making, because they are tomorrow's leaders," she said.