

# New prestige for SA Aids researcher

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South African world-leading Aids researcher Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, was recently elected to serve as the seventh president of The World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries (UNESCO-TWAS).

Expressing her honour and privilege to be elected, Professor Abdool Karim said she would use her position to target science academies and strategic partnership during these socially, politically and economically challenging times.

"This is a real honour and privilege to have the opportunity to build on the strong foundations established over four decades by my predecessors in realising the aspirational vision of the founder, Nobel Laureate Abdus Salam, on the use of science to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in the developing world," said Professor Abdool Karim.

The TWAS council, elected by members every four years, is responsible for supervising all Academy affairs. Professor Abdool Karim succeeds Sudanese mathematician Mohamed Hassan

He described Professor Abdool Karim as an accomplished scholar, scientist and health policy leader with deep knowledge of what it takes to train developing world scientists and make a powerful real-world impact with her research.

For the first time, the 16-member council will comprise exactly eight men and eight women. Professor Abdool Karim will also be the first woman to serve in the role of TWAS president. Furthermore, this is the first term the council will include a vice-president and council member from the global North.

"While we have made much progress in collaboration with the global network of science academies and strategic partnerships, much more remains to be done during these socially, politically and economically challenging times," said Professor Abdool Karim.

"This is also an opportunity for scien-

tific excellence in developing countries to flourish as we continue to find solutions to the ongoing and new challenges that face the most vulnerable in our communities," she added, "and ensure that we can all realise our full potential as one people in a safe planet that ensures a sustainable future for all who inhabit it."

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Professor Abdool Karim is the Associate Scientific Director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), a centre that undertakes high-impact globally relevant and locally responsive research on HIV, TB and SARS-CoV-2 epidemiology, pathogenesis, prevention and treatment. As an infectious diseases epidemiologist, her research focuses on the evolution of HIV, the factors influencing HIV acquisition, and the development and evaluation of interventions to prevent HIV infection in young women.

She is a passionate advocate for health equity and has developed novel strategies to introduce Aids treatment in high disease-burden settings and amid the Covid-19 pandemic. One way that she and her colleagues

sought to empower women was through a gel that contains Tenofovir, an antiretroviral medication. This innovative approach provided proof-of-concept that antiretrovirals prevent sexually transmitted infections of HIV in women. This study paved the way for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), which is widely used today.

Professor Abdool Karim is a professor in clinical epidemiology at Columbia University in the USA, and pro-vice chancellor for African Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Her scientific excellence has been recognised through more than 30 honours and awards, including the 2014 TWAS-Lenovovo Prize; the Order of Mapungubwe from the President of South Africa; the 2016 L'Oréal-UNESCO International Award for Women in Science for Africa and the Arab States region; the 2020 John Dirsks-Gairdner Global Health Award; the 2020 Christophe Mériex Prize from the French Academy of Sciences; the Special VinFuture Prize for Developing Country Innovators; and the 4th Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize for Medical Research.

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