

Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim elected President of The World Academy of Sciences

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UNIVERSITY of KwaZulu-Natal Pro Vice-Chancellor for African Health, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim has been elected President of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS).

Karim is the first woman to hold this position and will serve as its seventh president and as the President of the TWAS Council for the term 2023 – 2026. TWAS, a programme unit of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) announced the appointment of the infectious diseases epidemiologist and world leading authority on HIV prevention strategies following a rigorous process.

“It is a real honour and privilege to be elected as President of TWAS,” said Karim. “And 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.”

She succeeds Sudanese mathematician Dr Mohamed Hassan, who will serve on the Council (2023–2026) as the immediate past-President. Hassan congratulated Karim and said she is 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.

“I wish the new TWAS President and Council every success. I am confident that under their guidance, the academy will not only continue to build scientific capacity through research, education, policy and diplomacy – but also expand its activities and programmes, taking TWAS to new heights.” The TWAS Council, elected by members every four years, is responsible for supervising all academy affairs.

Abdool Karim, the Associate Scientific Director of Caprisa and a passionate



Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim.

advocate for health and gender equity, explained that “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”. She co-chairs the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10 Member Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM).

“This is also an opportunity for scientific 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 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,” said Karim, who is an NRF A1 rated scientist.

She is an elected member of the

National Academy of Medicine (USA), and Fellow of World Academy of Science, Royal Society of South Africa, Academy of Science of South Africa, and the African Academy of Science.

Her scientific excellence has been recognised through more than 30 honours and awards, including 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 Dirks Canada Gairdner Global Health Award, the 2020 Christophe Mérieux Prize from the French Academy of Sciences, and the 4th Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize for Medical Research from the government of Japan. She was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Macmaster in Ontario Canada on November 18.