

COVID-19 EXPERT THROWS IN THE TOWEL

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THE RESIGNATION of government's chief adviser on Covid-19 Professor Salim Abdool Karim has elicited mixed reactions, with the EFF labelling him "Dr Death" while other stakeholders believe it would be a great loss to the country.

In a scathing media statement yesterday, the EFF said it welcomed "the long overdue resignation of the incompetent and overrated "Dr Death", referring to Karim, who was the co-chairperson of Covid-19's ministerial advisory committee with Professor Marian Jacobs.

Jacobs will take over the reins, bringing in her previous experience as an Emeritus Professor of paediatrics and child health and the dean of the faculty of health sciences at UCT for seven years.

The EFF faulted Karim for making "horribly incorrect predictions" about the pandemic, saying his advice "has been centred around protecting the interests of capital over and above the protection of human life".

"Karim has been at the forefront of poor decisions made by the government, to prematurely ease lockdown regulations, only to tighten regulations once there has been an exhibition of increased infections of death," the EFF said.

Contacted last night regarding the EFF's statement, Karim said he was in a meeting and not in a position to speak.

He advised the Pretoria News to contact his public relation officer today (Friday) to arrange an interview with him.

The world-renowned scientist was further accused of lacking "foresight" as a scientist, but "operated solely on his misguided opinion, misleading not only the national government but the nation".

"His most dangerous advice was when South Africa reached the peak of the first wave of the virus and Karim endangered entire communities by advising schools to be reopened. It took the uproar of the EFF, school governing bodies, principals, trade unions and civil society for this foolish advice to be ignored," the EFF said.

Karim's resignation comes days after he advised the government to look into adjusting the country's alert level 1 to alert level 2 before the upcoming Easter holidays as a precautionary measure.

The SA Medical Association, however, differed with the EFF's views, saying Karim was "a great negotiator" and that the country would miss such a brilliant mind in the fight against the prevailing pandemic.

Its national chairperson Dr Angelique Coetzee said she had spoken to Karim on Wednesday and he had assured her "that there is no bad blood between him and the Ministry of Health about vaccines".

"The reason why he is stepping down is that he is a researcher, and this is what he has done all these years. A lot of work that he has been doing (as co-chair of the committee) interfered with his daily work at Caprisa, of looking at HIV vaccines," Coetzee said.

She said Karim also availed himself to be called by the association whenever it needed his assistance.

In the resignation letter he penned to Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize on February 24, Karim expressed gratitude for having served initially as the chairperson of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19.

"When I accepted the appointment on March 23 (2020), little did I realise how important science would be in helping our country navigating the complexities in the coronavirus pandemic," he wrote.

He said it had been most rewarding to work with leading scientists from a range of disciplines and it was time for him "to return to my HIV research and my academic commitments".

His last day with the ministerial advisory committee was on the eve of the virtual Cabinet meeting, where part of the agenda focused on the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out programme.

According to the statement by the government yesterday, the Cabinet acknowledged that "coronavirus disease Sisonke vaccination roll-out programme has been extended to 54 vaccine sites across the country". The programme has to date vaccinated more than 207 808 people.

The Department of Health said it was on track to vaccinate over 1.5 million healthcare workers by the end of phase 1 of vaccination from February to April.

Spokesperson of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers, Khaya Xaba declined to comment on Karim's departure.

The DA recently criticised the government's vaccination programme, suggesting the government was unlikely to achieve the target of inoculating healthcare workers by the end of March.

Attempts to get comment from the ANC spokesperson, Pule Mabe, were unsuccessful.

In a tribute to Karim, the department said: "The minister (Dr Zweli Mkhize) is sure all South Africans will join us as we convey our deep appreciation to Professor Abdool Karim for his exceptional stewardship during one of the greatest crises faced by humanity. Throughout, he has remained focused, level headed, calm and compassionate. Even under enormous pressure, Professor Abdool Karim always received everyone with his warm smile and reassuring presence."

According to the Department of Health,



World-renowned scientist, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, was accused of lacking "foresight"

PROFESSOR Salim Abdool Karim | African News Agency (ANA)



HEALTH Minister Zweli Mkhize

the government has targeted to inoculate over 1,5 million healthcare workers countrywide by the end of April as part of phase one. To date, the number sits at 207 808 people.

Phase two of the vaccination will be implemented over six months, starting from May to October, covering over 13 350 140 vulnerable groups, essential workers and occupational health and

safety stream. This includes workers in sectors that are critical for economic recovery such as mines, hospitality, taxi industry, retail and spaza shops, fruit and vegetable vendors, media and other beneficiaries.

The vaccination sites for phases two and three will expand to 2085. They will also include private sector sites to improve the efficiency and speed of the roll-out programme.

Phase three will be implemented over three months, between November and February 2022 to cover the remainder of all people in the country, targeting 22 600 640.

The Cabinet meeting on Tuesday welcomed the visit to the Biovac Manufacturing Facility in the Western Cape on March 18 by the chairperson of the inter-ministerial committee on Covid-19 vaccines, Deputy President David Mabuza.

During the visit, Mabuza conceded that the country's vaccination programme was not moving at the speed expected, saying several Covid-19 vaccine distribution sites did not have enough doses. On Saturday, 66 000 more doses of Johnson & Johnson arrived in the country.

As of Wednesday, the country recorded 1 540 009 confirmed Covid-19 cases. At least 1 048 new cases were reported with 121 Covid-related deaths, increasing the death toll to 52 372.