

PUBLIC HEALTH

Abdool Karim receives international award for 'Standing up for Science'

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INFECTIOUS diseases epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim has jointly received the prestigious 2020 John Maddox Prize for Standing up for Science for his contribution to informing the public about the Covid-19 pandemic.

Abdool Karim, who is also the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa, and American immunologist Anthony Fauci, who is the director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), were jointly honoured with the international prize during a virtual reception yesterday.

The John Maddox Prize is a joint initiative by charity Sense about Science and the scientific journal Nature.

This year more than 100 nominations were received from 34 countries, but ultimately only two were awarded the prize for standing up for sound science in public.

The recipients accepted their prize from an international panel of judges.

Abdool Karim said he was honoured to receive the prize jointly with Fauci. He said providing scientific advice on Covid-19 in the midst of uncertainty and anxiety proved to be a difficult task.

In addition, conspiracy theories made the task more challenging, he said. "I found that the task was made easier by staying true to the available scientific evidence without bending to ideology or vested interests."

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) said that through Abdool Karim's engagement on Covid-19 with stakeholders nationally, continentally and globally, he had ensured that the public was informed about the course



DR ANTHONY Fauci, the director of the US's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, left, with South African infectious diseases epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim at the International Aids Conference in 2016. The scientists have jointly received the 2020 John Maddox Prize for Standing up for Science during a virtual ceremony last night.

and impacts of the virus based on the best scientific evidence available.

The academy said Abdool Karim was an ambassador for evidence-based science and science communication with politicians, policymakers, scientists and the public.

"In the process he has done much to advance the mandate and objectives of the Academy of Science of South Africa," said ASSAf.

Dr Angelique Coetzee, chairperson of the South African Medical Association (Sama), congratulated Abdool Karim on behalf of the Sama board of directors as well as their members.

Coetzee said the awarding of this unique prize spoke volumes of his professionalism and dedication during an extremely difficult time in the country.

"Apart from your co-winner, Dr Fauci, I cannot think of a more worthy recipient of this incredible honour. I believe the awarding of this prize again

emphasises the value you have added to our country during the Covid-19 pandemic," she said.

The charity Sense about Science said Abdool Karim had a reputation for clear and honest communication which had allowed him to generate public trust in fast-moving science.

"Respected for his international science advocacy, engaging with the media and the public has become integral to his role as a scientist."

The charity said Fauci was recognised for his work to help the public understand both the science behind complex and controversial public health issues and how the nature of science influences government responses.

"While other government scientists have avoided the spotlight, he has steadfastly responded to questions from the public."