

Prestigious award for leading female scientist



Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim

August, known as Women's Month in South Africa, is a time when South Africans reflect on the anniversary of when more than 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women.

It is also a time for South Africans to take note of the women making ground breaking strides in various fields and industries. Tongaat-born, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, is one of the many South African women who are dominating in their field of study and making breakthroughs in medical science.

Abdool Karim has spent the past three decades studying HIV and AIDS and has become one of the world's leading epidemiologists, making major contributions to the global understanding of how the auto immune disease affects young

women. As associate scientific director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), Karim has been honoured by science bodies around the world for her ground-breaking research on HIV prevention.

She said that rapid progress against the disease means scientists are now close to eliminating transmission from infected mothers to infants, which stands at about 30 to 40%.

"AIDS was inevitably fatal and is now a chronic, manageable condition due to a constellation of factors. We now use the most advanced drug combination for treatment of AIDS patients. Scientists were able to develop antiretrovirals (ARV) and figure out the combination of antiretrovirals that enabled us to control viral "replication. We haven't stopped viral replication in human beings, but we are able to control it so that they can live a normal and

healthy life," said Abdool Karim. She said: "There were a number of children dying before age five, but we are now seeing growing numbers reach adolescence. However, in terms of preventing HIV infection, particularly sexual transmission, it remains a challenge. When you're talking about risk that's related to sex, it's a very touchy issue. There's a lot of moral overtones to it. So 'the science' is only the beginning. It's getting it to the individuals who need it. Ultimately, that for me is the importance of science."

Recently professor Abdool Karim was the joint recipient of the prestigious Fourth Hideyo Noguchi Prize, in the Medical Research category, along with her husband, clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist, Professor Salim Abdool Karim. The award, to be presented by the government of Japan, is in recognition of her contributions to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment through scientifically rigorous research, for her role in training African scientists and for their scientific leadership in the response to Covid-19 in Africa.

It is the first time that this award is being bestowed on South African scientists. The Hideyo Noguchi Prize, is one of the most prestigious awards to be presented by the Japanese government. It was established in honour of an outstanding Japanese medical scientist, Dr Hideyo Noguchi and aims to honour individuals and organisations that are at the frontline of combatting infectious diseases.

The awards ceremony, to be hosted by Japanese Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, will be held in Tunisia on 28 August as part of the Eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which is being held jointly with African Heads of State under the auspices of the African Union. Upon receiving the news Professor Karim said: "I am deeply honoured to be a joint recipient of the prestigious Noguchi Medical Research Award as it affirms

that African scientists are leading and making important contributions in the global fight against AIDS, TB and Covid-19. It recognises our multi-disciplinary research team of over 300, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, statisticians and laboratory scientists; thousands of volunteers; collaborators and sponsors across the world. But, the task is not yet complete. This

award inspires us to do even more to prevent and treat infectious diseases that threaten Africa's prosperity."

As women continue to do ground-breaking work in their respective fields, the staff and management of the Tongaat and Verulam Tabloid would like to wish our readers and advertisers a happy and prosperous Women's Month.