

■ NATION

Bill Gates praises work of SA scientists

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BILLIONAIRE Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates has hailed South Africa's Professors Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim as "heroes" for their fight against HIV/Aids and for helping to shape the world's response to Covid-19.

In a personal blog post published on Tuesday, Gates penned that he was inspired by the couple, two of the most respected HIV/Aids researchers in the world, who were now helping the world tackle Covid-19, too.

Gates wrote that in 2001, the Abdool Karims brought together a group of researchers they felt could make a bigger impact on HIV, and named the group Caprisa (Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in SA), which now runs three clinics, providing antiretrovirals to people living with HIV and studies new approaches to treating and preventing the disease.

Gates, however, said that the couple had to put their focus elsewhere to respond to Covid-19 and its devastating impact. "Unfortunately, much of the Abdool Karims' attention has been elsewhere this year. Drawing on their



PROFESSORS Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim.

experiences from HIV and TB, they are helping guide the Covid-19 response in South Africa and around the world.

"It is a shame that they haven't been able to focus on HIV/Aids, but on the other hand, it is a reminder of how fighting old diseases like HIV helps the world prepare for new ones like Covid-19," he wrote.

"What strikes me about this couple is how upbeat they are, even in the face of

devastating diseases like the coronavirus and HIV. Their motto at Caprisa is: 'Each day that you come to work, you should be looking for how today is going to be better than yesterday.' That is a lesson we can all take to heart."

Salim Abdool Karim said he was touched and humbled by the acknowledgment. "I heard about it on World Aids Day and I had a busy day, and when I got home my daughters were very excited and they said: 'Didn't you see Bill Gates' post?' and they sent me the link. I opened the link and I saw the video. It gave me a warm feeling about how he was looking at what we were doing. It really touched my heart."

The father of three, who has been working with his wife for over 30 years, said they were now focused on responding to the Covid-19 crisis. "Bill Gates is well aware of what we are doing now because we are dealing with the Covid situation.

"I think the recognition is that as you develop in a country like ours, you develop a scientific capability; it doesn't matter whether it is HIV or something else, when you are faced with a crisis you have that kind of strength, capacity and capability, and that's the point that Mr Gates is making," he said.