

MIXED REACTION

Prof Karim bows out of Covid-19 advisory job

SIHLE MAVUSO AND VIASEN SOOBRAMONEY

PROFESSOR Salim Abdool Karim's resignation as co-chair of the Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee (MAC) on Covid-19 has elicited mixed reactions, with some stakeholders in the healthcare sector expressing shock and some political parties saying he failed to do his job.

Karim's departure from the committee which was tasked with advising Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize and the Cabinet on how to contain the spread of Covid-19 in the country, became public knowledge yesterday.

He had been co-chairing the committee for a year and provided leadership when the country first went into a hard lockdown in March last year after cases of Covid-19 were reported.

In a statement he issued yesterday, Karim said he was honoured to serve on the MAC and that as his one-year term drew to an end, the committee was still in capable hands and that he would now return to his academic commitments and his research on HIV.

Mkhize's department, meanwhile, said Karim indicated his desire to leave the position during a meeting held last week.

The ministry lauded him for responding to the national call of duty when his country needed his service the most.

"Prof Abdool Karim has presided over a Ministerial Advisory Committee that has positioned South Africa as one of the leading nations in the emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic. He has become a trusted figure for so many South Africans, who have grown accustomed to his singular ability of explaining complex scientific concepts in simple terms that all of us can understand," the ministry said in a statement.

Adding its voice following the departure, IFP's Mkhuleko Hlengwaw said the party were sad to see Karim leave.

"(We are) disappointed to see Professor Salim Abdool Karim, co-chair of the Covid-19 Ministerial Advisory Committee, step down as his one-year term on the MAC comes to an end. We would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to Prof Karim for his contribution in fighting the devastating coronavirus pandemic. Thanks in part to his guidance and expertise, South Africa was able to weather the first two waves of Covid-19, and further, save the lives of hundreds of thousands of South Africans," Hlengwaw said.

Head of corporate Communications at the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), Alfred Thutloa, said they wished Karim well with his future endeavours and finding biomedical interventions for HIV.

Dr Angelique Coetzee, the chairperson of the SAMRC, saluted Karim for his work.

He added that he was pleased to learn that Abdool Karim was not disillusioned with the MAC but rather he was confident that he had left the MAC in a stable condition which would allow him to get back to his other work.