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SA Aids researcher becomes first woman to head World Academy of Sciences

Prof Quarraisha Abdool Karim has developed novel strategies to introduce Aids treatment in high disease-burden settings

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LEADING LADY SA's Prof Quarraisha Abdool Karim has been elected president of The World Academy of Sciences.

Image: Rajesh Jantilal

Leading SA Aids researcher Prof Quarraisha Abdool Karim has been elected president of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), the first woman to head the post.

For the first time, the 16-member council of the academy – which focuses on the advancement of science in developing countries – will comprise eight men and eight women.

Abdool Karim is the associate scientific director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in SA (Caprisa), a Durban-based centre that conducts research into HIV, TB and Sars-CoV-2 epidemiology, pathogenesis, prevention and treatment.

As an infectious diseases epidemiologist, her research focuses on the evolution of HIV, the factors influencing HIV acquisition, and the development and evaluation of interventions to prevent HIV infection in young women.

She has developed novel strategies to introduce Aids treatment in high disease-burden settings and amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

“It is an honour and privilege to be elected president of TWAS and to have the opportunity to build on the strong foundations established over four decades by my predecessors in realising the aspirational vision of the founder, Nobel laureate Abdus Salam, on the use of science to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in the developing world,” said Abdool Karim.

Abdool Karim succeeds Sudanese mathematician Mohamed Hassan.

“While we have made much progress in collaboration with the global network of science academies and strategic partnerships, much more remains to be done during these socially, politically and economically challenging times,” said Abdool Karim.

“This is also an opportunity for scientific excellence in developing countries to flourish as we continue to find solutions to the ongoing and new challenges that face the most vulnerable in our communities and ensure we can all realise our full potential as one people in a safe planet that ensures a sustainable future for all.”

Hassan described her as an “accomplished scholar, scientist and health policy leader with deep knowledge of what it takes to train developing world scientists and make a powerful real-world impact with her research”.

Abdool Karim is also a professor in clinical epidemiology at Columbia University, US, and pro-vice-chancellor for African Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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