

Karim receives award for Aids research from AU

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PRESIDENT Jacob Zuma paid a glowing tribute to one of South African's finest scientists, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, for receiving an award from the AU.

"President Jacob Zuma has ... congratulated South African Professor Salim S Abdool Karim for receiving the AU's annual Kwame Nkrumah Scientific Award in the field of earth and life science," said spokesman Mac Maharaj.

Karim is the pro-vice-chancellor of research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa).

"He has contributed to 30 years of research on the continent, especially in the field of HIV and Aids," said Maharaj.

Karim was the recipient of Africa's most prestigious prize for science, the Kwame Nkrumah Award worth \$100 000 (R1.2 million).

The award was presented to him at the AU general assembly in Addis Ababa yesterday by the chairwoman of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

Karim is also a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University in New York.

In an interview shortly before his departure for Addis Ababa, Karim said he was "humbled and honoured" to receive the award. "It is significant because it is recognition for the role African medical research is playing in addressing the Aids pandemic in Africa.

"It also honours the dedicated teams of scientists in South Africa and elsewhere that have never given up hope of finding solutions to stopping deaths from TB/HIV, which



HONOURED: South African winner of the Earth and Life Sciences Award, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, at the Kwame Nkrumah Scientific Awards, held at the new AU building in Addis Ababa.

Picture: DoC

remains one of Africa's biggest killers.

"And we need to slow and, eventually stop, new HIV infections, particularly in young women, who are the worst-affected group in southern Africa," he said.

On a personal note, he said that, as a young medical student and a political activist in the late 1970s, he read, followed and supported the pan African philosophies of Kwame Nkrumah, former leader of Ghana and a founding member of the OAU, forerunner of the AU.

"To receive this award named after him is therefore very special," he said. In conferring the award, the

commission acknowledged Karim's "great scientific achievement and contribution through science for the socio-economic development of Africa".

Karim said momentous headway had been made in treating and preventing Aids, including making a gel which had been shown to stop the Aids virus from penetrating the body during sex, but the commitment to use many of these interventions was lacking.

"We might come up with new approaches and solutions to improve HIV prevention and treatment, but if there isn't the public buy-in it doesn't help," he said.

In addition, reducing the incidence of HIV in young women between the ages of 15 and 25 was critical.

"We have to find ways of getting good science that works into clinical practice."

Karim admits these are "bigger than big" challenges. And yet, a wealth of new strategies and clinical trials and studies are waiting in the wings.

"Science is always about taking very small steps, but as long as we continue taking those steps and accepting that along with success are setbacks and disappointments, we will triumph in the end," he said.