

NATION

Prof Karim resigns with third wave on horizon

SIHLE MAVUSO, VIASEN SOOBRAMONEY,
NICOLA DANIELS AND RAPULA MOATSHE

THE resignation of Professor Salim Abdool Karim as co-chairperson of the Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee (MAC) on Covid-19 ahead of the much-feared third wave has been met with surprise, with the health sector lauding his dedication and leadership in the global fight against the pandemic.

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

He has been co-chairing the committee for a year and provided leadership when the country first went into a hard lockdown in March last year.

The Health Ministry said Karim indicated his desire to leave the position during a meeting held last week Friday.

In the resignation letter to Minister Mkhize on February 24, Karim expressed gratitude for having served initially as the chairperson of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19.

"When I accepted the appointment on March 23 (2020), little did I realise how important science would be in helping our country to navigate the complexities of the coronavirus pandemic," he wrote.

He said it had been most rewarding to work with leading scientists from a range of disciplines and it was time for him "to return to my HIV research and my academic commitments".

His last day with the ministerial advisory committee was on the eve of the virtual Cabinet meeting, where part of the agenda focused on the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out programme.

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

"Professor Abdool Karim has presided over a ministerial advisory com-

mittee 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.

The chairperson of Parliament's portfolio committee on health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said he was initially shocked by the news of Karim's resignation.

"Professor Abdool Karim has clarified that he had been with the MAC for about a year and there was a need to get back to the very important work he is doing regarding HIV," said Dhlomo.

He added that he was pleased to learn that 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.

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

Dr Angelique Coetzee, who serves as the chairperson of the South African Medical Association, saluted Karim for his work.

"I had a chat with Professor Karim and I understand why he is doing this. It's been a very hard year since he took over as chairperson of MAC. He did sterling work but his passion and great love is doing research and he feels that the past year took a lot of his time away from his great love.

"We acknowledge the insights that he brought. He did a great job during a very difficult time.

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