



Cholera: municipalities slated

'Local government failures led to breakdown of infrastructure'

EXCLUSIVE

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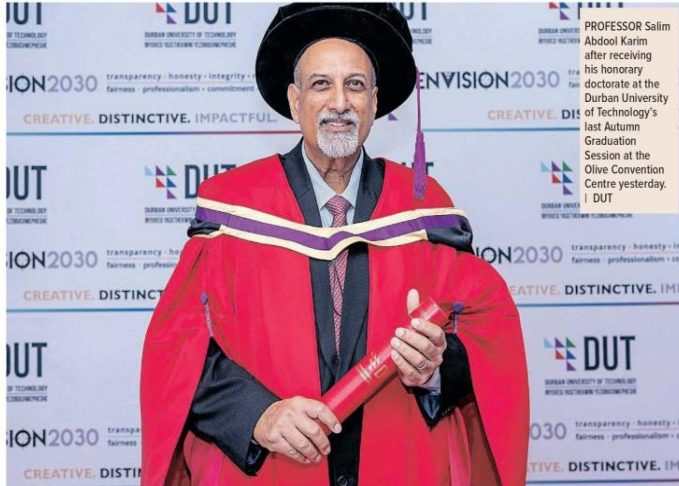
COLLAPSED structures of local government are to blame for the cholera outbreak detected in three of South Africa's provinces.

This was according to world-renowned health expert Professor Salim Abdool Karim when speaking exclusively with the *Daily News* on the sidelines while having an honorary doctorate conferred on him from the Durban University of Technology.

Karim said the cholera situation was dire and concerning. He has been following the way cholera has been spreading in Malawi and Haiti.

"In South Africa we would normally not be concerned about cholera, but because there has been such poor service delivery by local government many sewerage treatment plants are now in disarray.

"By itself that is not a problem, but the problem comes when the water treatment plants are also broken. The damaged sewage plants can contaminate rivers, dams and the water to the treatment plants, of which in turn they are



PROFESSOR Salim Abdool Karim after receiving his honorary doctorate at the Durban University of Technology's last Autumn Graduation Session at the Olive Convention Centre yesterday. | DUT

not able to take out all of the cholera," said Karim.

He touched on the situation at Hammanskraal, where the sewage treatment plant and the water treatment plant are not working.

"Then you hear the local government saying to the people, don't drink water from the taps. Now that is a recipe for disaster," he said.

Karim said he would encourage all local governments to transparently publish their information on the water quality they are providing in their respective municipalities to avoid further cholera outbreaks.

Karim has held several positions, including chairing the former Covid-19 Advisory Committee, and is currently the Special Advisor to the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) on pandemics.

He said that in dealing with an epidemic like cholera, it was very important for the local governments to be transparent, and that 'they must provide us with evidence that our sewage treatment plants are working and the quality of the water in our taps is high'.

"If the local government does not convince us that the water is safe, then we are heading for trouble. Cholera is not really a big concern when your water treatment plants are working

properly," said Karim.

About his honorary doctorate from DUT, he said when he first heard about the accolade, he was excited and deeply honoured.

"To me it's not about the honorary doctorate, but the spotlight given to science and the contribution I have made to better our lives," he said.

So far, cholera has claimed the lives of 24 people. The affected areas include Hammanskraal in Pretoria, Gauteng, Free State and Limpopo.

When contacted, Sivuyile Mbambato, a spokesperson for the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), said their organisation had yet to have a consultation with the City of Tshwane to fully understand its shortfalls.

"I cannot dispute the professor's sentiments, but it would also be fair for us to comment fully only once we have had engagements with the representatives of the City of Tshwane," said Mbambato.

The Minister of Health, Joe Phaahla, said there had been no new reported deaths or severe cases of cholera over the past seven days.

Phaahla said there had been a definite decline in terms of overall diarrhoea cases and a significant decline in reported cases of diarrhoea.