Karim dismisses R94m claim as nonsense, fake

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SOUTH African medical scientist Professor Salim Abdool Karim yesterday dismissed a claim made by a group that he had gone viral on social media, alleging he had received R94 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as "nonsense.

Abdool Karim, an epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist who serves on the ministerial committee that advises President Cyril Ramapho- phosa on the country’s COVID-19 response and who fund cOVID-19 for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa, said that the organi- sation of KwaZulu-Natal said, he became aware of the posts after one had been sent.

The original post was published on Twitter by a non-government organisation that monitors critical, observer using the handle @crit_opuser, which Twitter has subse- quently temporarily restricted claim- ing there had been "some unusual activity".

"Maybe CovidRamaPhosa is fol- lowing you on Twitter and got ex- cited," Abdool Karim said. "He was miffed by the Gates Foundation (for ?). Who believes me now? How can you check links? twitter.com/crit_opuser?"

The link connects to another tweet which was not being followed by the user, according to the report.

The posts collectively received just 42 likes and 57 retweets. It is unlikely that anyone would appear to have been widely disseminated on other platforms such as WhatsApp, providing a basis for any fresh debate or legal consideration of the controversial claim.

The post read: "To people, espe- cially you, that takes to heart, that are spreading fake news about Prof Karim. This is his direct response: "This fake news about me receiving money from the Gates is spreading within the Muslim community. It is from a fake Twitter news account that was closed by Twitter over questions of fake news as well. I have served on the Gates Advisory Board for over 10 years. I also chair the WHO Scientific Committee on HIV and lots of other committee. Since then it is wrong to advise these groups. I am not a beacon for them. I am the leader of the Gates Foundation, I do not have grants from them. I do not want to tell you the truth to help stop the fake news. If you spread fake news and conspiracy theories, believe me, I have no patience for this."

Abdool Karim confirmed yester- day that he had written the above response. "If you go onto Twitter you will see the original post has been shut down as a source of multiple fake news stories. It has been used to have been obviously set up to generate this kind of media attention," he said.

"Several people started sending it to me, asking if I knew about the fake news item was going around. I sent a short note to one of them saying 94 million is ridiculous. It’s all nonsense, here’s the facts. I didn’t even think it was worth a response," he said.

"Put simply, I was an advisor to me. What’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with the World Health Organization scientific com- mittees of which I have been a part of. When a scientific expert, the organization that asked me to be a member said, I’m a scientific expert panel," he said.

Asked whether he, Capsira or the received money to receive any funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Abdool Karim said: "Even if I did, what has that got to do with Covid-19? My view is whether I have received money from the MRC, nor from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It doesn’t impact on my objectivity or any scientific uncertainty on the issue of Covid-19. In any way, I have nothing to say to this. I got nothing to do with what I do to regard with the virus, or whether I received money or not."

When pressed to confirm whether he had received any fund- ing, he declined to answer.

"I am not answering the question because I didn’t want to lie. It’s not a matter of whether I received funding from the foundation or not. That should be irrelevent to my scientific stature and what I’m doing with Covid-19," he said.

He said there were some people who were opposed to Gates for his genetics research, and Donald Trump’s handling of the pandemic, and "seemed to have fallen for the trap. It is irrelevant whether I received money or not," Abdool Karim said.

BILL GATES FUNDING DISCLOSURE

A COURSIVIY on-line search reveals that South African medical research institutions and academics, includ- ing the National Institute of Research in South Africa (Capsira) have received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation over the years.

A post on the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation website reveals that in July 2016 an amount of R123,375 992 (627,553 million) was provided to Capsira in Durban, "To develop practical approaches to adapt and incorporate vaccines and incorpo- rating the perspective of African thought leaders and two South African researchers, the National Research Council of Science, Mathematics and the Part of the Global Health Programme, Capsira website highlights the awarding of a grant of $400 000 in August 2016 to one of its scientists, Dr Selwin Sitah of the University of the Witwatersrand and the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI)

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