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Media statement

Leading South African medical research institute commemorates 20 years of scientific excellence

The Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) will bring together eminent global and national scientists at a symposium to mark two decades of medical scientific excellence since its establishment in 2002. CAPRISA is renowned internationally for outstanding evidence-based contributions through its epidemiological, pathogenesis and treatment studies leading to its global reputation for research excellence in infectious diseases.

Several distinguished international scientists will address the symposium, including:
Ambassador John Nkengasong, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator & Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy (former Director of the Africa CDC);
Professor Peter Piot Special Advisor on Covid-19 to the President of the European Commission, EU Chief Scientific Advisor on Epidemics, past Director: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine & past Executive Director: UNAIDS;
Professor Jeremy Farrar Chief Scientist, World Health Organisation;
Professor Thomas Quinn, NIH Distinguished Investigator and Associate Director of International Research at NIAID & Director: Johns Hopkins Center for Global Health; and
Professor Cate Hankins at McGill University & member of the Canadian Covid-19 committee.

The symposium will be held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre Complex (ICC) in Durban on 26 June.

The award-winning South African research organisation, CAPRISA, has reached a 20-year milestone in seminal research addressing the two biggest AIDS challenges in Africa: reducing HIV-TB co-infection deaths and preventing new HIV infections in young women, said the co-founders and world-renowned epidemiologists, Professors Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim. CAPRISA scientists provided the first scientific evidence and proof-of-concept showing that antiretrovirals prevents the sexual transmission of HIV and that integrated TB-HIV treatment halves co-infection deaths which is included in the WHO guidelines on HIV-TB co-infection treatment. CAPRISA's seminal research paved the way for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) which is widely used in HIV prevention today.

CAPRISA was established in 2002 during the height of the HIV epidemic and AIDS denialism in South Africa as a multi-institutional independent non-profit AIDS Research Organisation. The



organisation facilitated the scientific training of over 600 scientists in South Africa, many of whom are leadership positions today and continues to strengthen the science base for excellence in HIV research in South Africa through an extensive mentorship program. Currently, CAPRISA is continuing pioneering multi-disciplinary work on broadly neutralizing antibodies (bnAbs) in HIV prevention. The discovery of the CAPRISA 256 bnAb provides the opportunity to evaluate passive immunization as a potential long-acting injectable HIV prevention strategy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, CAPRISA's scientists pivoted and provided scientific leadership at a national and global level, epidemiological analyses and public education, placing South African science on the global platform.

In her congratulatory message Nobel Laureate and Chair of the CAPRISA Scientific Advisory Board Professor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi acknowledged the significant contributions of CAPRISA saying "we are celebrating 20 years of extraordinary achievement in responding to HIV, HIV-TB co-infection, and more recently, COVID 19." CAPRISA's work is "setting a new path in global health and is playing a pivotal role in promoting a network of research organizations in Africa." she said.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim served as the South African government's Chief Scientific Advisor on Covid-19 as the first Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Covid-19, providing science advice on Covid-19 to several African countries through the Africa Task Force on Coronavirus and as a Commissioner on the African Union's Commission on Covid-19. Prof Quarraisha Abdool Karim served as a member of South Africa's Ministerial Advisory Committee for Covid-19 in 2020 and is a member of the Executive Group of the WHO Covid-19 treatment and vaccine Solidarity trials.

In 2022, Salim was appointed as Special Advisor on pandemics to the Director-General of the WHO and Quarraisha as the President of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS).

The symposium will follow the launch of Professor Salim Abdool Karim's book: *Standing up for Science*, published by Pan Macmillan.

Enquiries:

Smita Maharaj

Smita.maharaj@caprisa.org

Mobile/ WhatsApp 082 806 9931