

Acclaimed science professors honoured at Rhodes graduation

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Acclaimed epidemiology professors Samil Abdoool Karim and his wife, Quarraisha, took to the Rhodes University graduation stage yesterday to receive honorary degrees conferred by the institution.

Quarraisha received a doctor of science (DSc) honorary degree while Salim, who was virtually honoured with a doctor of science (DSc) degree during the institution's October graduation season, was capped and hooded alongside his wife.

Co-founder of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in SA (Caprisa), Quarraisha said she was humbled by the honour.

The clinical epidemiology professor said she had travelled a long journey from 1989 when

one of the first population-based surveys in SA was conducted in the research of HIV.

She said the survey highlighted the need for women-initiated HIV prevention technologies.

"That survey revealed women had more infection than men and acquired infection earlier," Quarraisha said.

"Further work with women from different locations, occupations and age ranges highlighted that they knew what the issue was — that the existing prevention technologies were all dependent on male co-operation.

"What they needed were technologies they could use to control their risk, particularly when they couldn't negotiate condom use and mutually faithful relationships."



Quarraisha said the steps that followed were inspired by the need to help women deal with the social dilemma.

Caprisa's 2003 decision to change its strategy and evaluate an antiretroviral for prevention led to the organisation demonstrating for the first time that antiretrovirals could prevent HIV infection.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Professors Quarraisha Abdoool Karim, left, and Salim Abdoool Karim with dean of science Prof Tony Booth, centre

Photograph: VELISILE BUKULA

These findings were highlighted by the journal *Science* as one of the top 10 scientific breakthroughs in 2010.

Quarraisha played a central role in building the science base in Southern Africa through the Columbia University-Southern African Fogarty Aids International Training and Research Programme which

has trained more than 600 scientists in Southern Africa.

She is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine (USA) and a Fellow of The World Academy of Science, Royal Society of SA, Academy of Science of SA and the African Academy of Science.

She is also an SA National Research Foundation A1 rated scientist.

Her contributions highlighting the vulnerability of young women, the need for women-initiated technologies and the integration of HIV-prevention efforts into sexual reproductive health services have been recognised by more than 40 local and international awards, including the order of Maphungubwe from the SA president.

Rhodes University vice-chancellor Sizwe Mabizela said

the institution was honoured to celebrate Quarraisha alongside three other honorees — anti-apartheid activist Lord Peter Hain, anthropologist Professor Makhosazana Xaba and late ambassador Lindiwe Mabuza.

"We are pleased we had the opportunity to celebrate and honour four outstanding South Africans who have contributed immensely, through self-sacrifices, but also in many and diverse ways lifted those in difficult circumstances," Mabizela said.

"Prof Quarraisha Abdoool Karim has had an immense contribution in our understanding of HIV/Aids and how it affects rural people, particularly women.

"We are also delighted her husband could come and be here with us."