

ROYAL SOCIETY

SA's top Aids researcher joins elite Einstein club

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SA's leading Aids researcher and scientist, Prof Salim Abdool Karim, was inducted on Friday as a fellow of prestigious science academy the Royal Society.

The London-based Royal Society was established in 1660 by royal charter and has included many of the world's leading scientists over the past four centuries, from Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin to Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking.

Fellowship of the society is awarded to an individual who has made a "substantial contribution to the improvement of natural knowledge, including mathematics, engineering science and medical science".

Karim is the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in SA (Caprisa) and Caprisa professor of global health at the Maliman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York.

He is also pro-vice chancellor (research) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

On his return from the induction on Monday, the professor said the "enormity of the occasion ... hits you when you have to go up during the induction to sign 'the book'."

This is the same book that was signed in 1660 by Sir Christopher Wren and others who founded the Royal Society. It has signatures of many of the world's great scientists.

"I felt truly humbled to be in such august company and I know that I could never have achieved this without the amazing people that I work with in Caprisa and our many collaborators," he said.

Karim was hailed in a 2014 Nature Medicine article as "one of SA's undisputed leaders in clinical research" and is credited with turning around the Medical Research Council.

He chairs the UNAids scientific expert panel and the World Health Organisation strategic and technical advisory group on HIV.

He is also an elected member of the US National Academy of Medicine and the American Academy of Microbiology.