

Top award for SA Aids researchers

STAFF REPORTER

SOUTH Africa's leading Aids researchers, professors Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim, have been named the recipients of the esteemed Institute for Human Virology (IHV) Lifetime Achievement Award for exceptional public service for their contributions to the global Aids response.

The award was presented by Dr Robert Gallo, who discovered HIV as the cause of Aids, at the 19th international meeting of the IHV yesterday in Baltimore in the US.

Salim Abdool Karim is the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa) and Quarraisha Abdool Karim is its associate scientific director. They are both professors in epidemiology at Columbia University, New York and honorary academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. They are renowned for their tireless and distinguished scientific contributions in HIV prevention and treatment research that span nearly three decades.

"To me, both of these renowned individuals have made some of the greatest contributions in the history of HIV/Aids in public health and epidemiology relevant to prevention and care of infected people," said Gallo. "I don't know any person or persons who have done more to advance the proper care of people with HIV infection or the prevention of HIV infection among a population."

Their scientific contributions have focused on trying to prevent HIV in women in Africa. They were the first to demonstrate that anti-retrovirals can prevent sex-

ual transmission of HIV in 2010, when they shared the results of the Caprisa004 tenofovir gel trial. The landmark Caprisa 004 study was recognised by the journal *Science* as one of the Top 10 scientific breakthroughs in 2010. They also discovered that the tenofovir gel prevents genital herpes, the first drug shown to be effective against this disease. Currently, they are involved in developing innovative ways of preventing HIV in women.

Commenting on the award, the Abdool Karim's said they "were deeply appreciative of the recognition by the IHV, a centre of excellence in HIV research."

"We accept the award not just on our own behalf, but in recognition of the resilience and contributions of the thousands of South Africans, who have been central, as participants in their research, to the effort to develop better and more effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies."

The IHV is a leading US research centre that combines the disciplines of basic science, epidemiology and clinical research in a concerted effort to speed up the discovery of diagnostics and therapeutics for a wide variety of chronic and deadly viral and immune disorders – most notably HIV. A particular focus of IHV includes learning how to use the body's natural chemistry for its own therapeutic potential and pursuing biologically-based treatment approaches that are less toxic to the body and, often, less costly to the patient and public. IHV also pursues the development of effective therapeutic and preventative vaccines.

They were first to prove ARVs curb HIV sexual transmission