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Media Statement

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Rhodes University to honour infectious diseases epidemiologist, Professor Salim Abdool Karim

At its second virtual graduation ceremony for Masters and PhD students on 29 October 2021, Rhodes University will confer a degree of Doctor of Science (DSc) (honoris causa) on epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim, who is widely recognised for his scientific and leadership contributions in AIDS and COVID-19.

Over the years, Professor Abdool Karim has built a firm reputation as an outstanding, internationally recognised academic researcher on HIV-AIDS research and has established South Africa as a world leader in the field. More recently, he has conscientiously led the South African public to an understanding of the SARS CoV-2 virus.

“Our nation owes you an inestimable debt of gratitude and appreciation for all that you have done to give much hope to many South Africans and for being a passionate advocate of science to guide the South African response to COVID-19. In the many public briefings on COVID-19, you have always provided extremely lucid explanations and unambiguous information for the South African public and explaining the scientific basis for the government’s response to the pandemic,” said Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela.

While doing his medical degree at the University of Natal, Professor Abdool Karim simultaneously studied computer science and statistics at the University of South Africa. After completing his MBChB in 1983, he did a Masters degree focusing on Epidemiology at

Columbia University in New York. He returned to the University of Natal to complete his Masters degree in Public Health Medicine and his PhD.

Professor Abdool Karim's primary academic appointments are the Director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) and CAPRISA Professor for Global Health in the Department of Epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. His additional academic appointments are Adjunct Professor of Immunology and Infectious Diseases at Harvard University, Boston, Adjunct Professor of Medicine at Cornell University, New York, and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. He previously served as President of the South African Medical Research Council.

He co-led the research that provided the first evidence for antiretroviral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) against HIV infection, a finding that was heralded by UNAIDS and WHO as one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs in the fight against AIDS and has been ranked among "The Top 10 Scientific Breakthroughs of 2010" by the journal *Science*. His clinical research on TB-HIV treatment has shaped international guidelines on the clinical management of co-infected patients. He is co-inventor on patents which have been used in several HIV vaccine candidates.

Professor Abdool Karim is a member of the Science Council of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the WHO TB-HIV Task Force. He is the Chair of the WHO's Strategic and Technical Advisory Committee on HIV and Hepatitis. He is a Member of the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus, the African Union Commission on Covid-19 and the Lancet Commission on COVID-19. For his critically important role in the COVID-19 pandemic, he received, jointly with Dr Anthony Fauci, the 2020 John Maddox Prize for "Standing up for Science".

Professor Abdool Karim is ranked among the world's most highly cited scientists by *Web of Science*. He serves on the Boards of several prestigious journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Lancet Global Health* and *Lancet HIV*. His many awards include the African Union's "Kwame Nkrumah Award", Africa's most prestigious scientific award. He is an elected Fellow of The World Academy of Sciences, the African Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Science in South Africa, the Royal Society of South Africa and the American Academy of Microbiology. He is a Member of the US National Academy of Medicine. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Of this honorary degree, Professor Abdool Karim stated, “I am deeply grateful to Rhodes University for this honour. As one of the finest universities on the African continent, Rhodes University represents both scientific excellence and a strong commitment to academic freedom. These are the same principles needed in providing policy advice – whether on pandemics, climate change or other contentious challenging areas of public action. In the course of both the HIV and COVID-19 pandemics, I have personally witnessed the importance of staying true to science and evidence.”

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ISSUED BY THE DIVISION FOR COMMUNICATION AND ADVANCEMENT ON BEHALF OF RHODES UNIVERSITY.

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