Aids award ‘special’

KAMCILLA PILLAY

FOR HIV and Aids researcher, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, being honoured by the AU for his contribution to science reminded him of his days as an activist in the Struggle.

Speaking to the Daily News before boarding his flight to Addis Ababa to collect the Kwame Nkrumah Scientific Award, he said: “I’ve been honoured many times before, but this award is particularly important to me.

“It reminds me of a time when I was an activist in the Struggle. Kwame Nkrumah was one of those leaders I looked up to, and to be selected and given an accolade in his name makes it all the more special.”

Achievement

The researcher, based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, collected the $100 000 (R1.1 million) award for his research on HIV prevention and treatment in Africa on Saturday at the AU Commission.

Karim is a clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist whose contributions to microbicides research for HIV prevention have spanned two decades and culminated in the tenofovir gel trial, which provided proof-of-concept that antiretroviral drugs could prevent sexually transmitted HIV infection and herpes simplex virus type 2 in women.

He is also chair of the Unaids scientific expert panel, and a member of the scientific advisory board of the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Karim is also on the World Health Organisation’s expert advisory panel on sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

In conferring the award, the AU Commission acknowledged him “for great scientific achievement and contribution through science for the socio-economic development of Africa”.

Karim, the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa), said that the award recognised the importance of science and the contributions of scientific innovation in the path to a healthier Africa.

President Jacob Zuma has extended his congratulations to Karim in a statement.

“Africa’s scientists have an important role to play in scientific innovation and research, which will contribute to Africa’s development and regional integration,” he said.