

PRESS RELEASE

UNAIDS to establish international scientific expert panel on HIV

UNAIDS' new panel will convene a series of scientific consultations to ensure that the best scientific evidence is used to inform the global response to HIV

GENEVA, 3 June 2013—The Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Michel Sidibé today announced the appointment of South African scientist, Professor Salim S. Abdool Karim as Chair of the newly established *UNAIDS Scientific Expert Panel*. Mr Sidibe made the announcement in Durban, South Africa during his opening address at a UNAIDS Scientific Symposium on the implications of the “Mississippi baby” for public health programmes on mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The panel will advise UNAIDS on major new scientific discoveries, as well as gaps and strategic needs in AIDS research and on how UNAIDS can adjust its policies to address these needs and shape the AIDS response.

“In the thirty years since HIV was identified, the progress made by science has been extraordinary and its benefits have been felt far beyond those directly affected by HIV,” said UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé. “To reach the end of the AIDS epidemic, we need to continue to embrace science and innovation and I am delighted that Professor Karim has agreed to take on the leadership of our new UNAIDS scientific panel.”

Chaired by Professor Karim, Director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa—CAPRISA (a long-standing UNAIDS Collaborating Centre), the panel will provide strategic advice on the relevance of new research and findings and how they can be rapidly implemented to best effect to prevent new HIV infections and improve the lives of people living with HIV.

“Science has the power to illuminate the future path to defeating AIDS. I am humbled by this appointment and look forward to this new challenge,” said Professor Karim, an epidemiologist, who has conducted research on HIV epidemiology, pathogenesis, prevention and treatment over the past 25 years. Professor Karim holds academic appointments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa and at Columbia University in New York and is interim President of the South African Medical Research Council.

As part of its new mandate the panel will convene international scientific consultations on behalf of UNAIDS, the first of which is already underway in Durban South Africa. The topic of this first meeting is *Scientific advances from the ‘Mississippi baby’: Implications for public health programmes on mother to child transmission of HIV*. The doctor who cared for the Mississippi baby Dr Hannah Gay, from the University of Mississippi, is one of the invited experts who will present the case history. At the meeting experts will discuss ways to improve early diagnosis of HIV in new-born children and implications of starting them on antiretroviral therapy early.

“We in Mississippi are honoured to be able to share the findings on our baby with such an important group of leaders in the scientific community,” said Dr Hannah Gay, who treated the ‘Mississippi baby’ at the University of Mississippi Medical Centre. “We are hopeful that this contribution will lead to further knowledge that will save the hundreds of thousands of children born with HIV globally.”

The members of the *UNAIDS Scientific Expert Panel* will be announced in the coming weeks.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

CAPRISA

Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) (www.caprisa.org) is a multi-institutional AIDS research organization, with its headquarters at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. CAPRISA is a designated UNAIDS Collaborating Centre for HIV Prevention Research. The main goal of CAPRISA is to undertake globally relevant and locally responsive research that contributes to understanding HIV pathogenesis, prevention and epidemiology, as well as the links between tuberculosis and AIDS care. CAPRISA comprises four research programmes: HIV pathogenesis & vaccines, HIV and TB treatment, Microbicides, and HIV prevention and epidemiology.