

SAMRC drops probe into Prof Glenda Gray's Covid-19 regulations comments

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) has dropped the investigation into its president, Professor Glenda Gray, for critical comments she made in an interview about some of the government's Covid-19 regulations.



Professor Glenda Gray

The SAMRC board said it had received a complaint from the Department of Health about what Gray had [said in her personal capacity](#). But after a review of its policies found she hadn't transgressed any of them.

Gray chairs the research sub-committee on Health Minister Zweli Mkhize's team of 50 expert Covid-19 pandemic advisors. Her specialities are child health and HIV/Aids, and she was a leading activist in the time when the government, under former President Thabo Mbeki, refused to acknowledge that HIV causes Aids and did all it could to thwart her efforts to find treatments.

Witch hunt

In the fight against Covid-19, Gray came under fire from the Department of Health, in particular its acting director general Anban Pillay, for saying that some of the regulations, such as what winter clothing could be sold under Level 4 lockdown, were "unscientific".

Pillay then wrote a letter to the SAMRC board requesting a probe into Gray's behaviour, reminding them that the council was a Department of Health entity.

The retaliatory action by the Department of Health and Pillay then unleashed a groundswell of support for Gray from the scientific community. Some 250 scientists signed a petition in support of her.

In addition, Wits vice chancellor, Adam Habib, former University of the Free State vice chancellor, Jonathan Jansen, and top academic at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Professor Jerome Singh, co-authored a damning article published in the *South African Medical Journal* advising Mkhize to distance himself from the actions of Pillay.

The authors said Mkhize's response, a lengthy statement refuting some of Gray's claims, was sharp, but fair, but that Gray should perhaps have engaged government officials and the minister prior to making public statements. "However, the follow-up action on the part of Pillay, crossed the line. Such a move is vindictive, disproportionate and reflects an intolerance to criticism. There is a fundamental difference between holding someone accountable and conducting a witch hunt," they said.

Commitment

Following the SAMRC's board's decision, Gray released a statement, saying: "I would like to assure the board and colleagues at the SAMRC that I remain focused on the important work of the SAMRC.

"I also re-affirm my commitment to doing all I can to the best of my ability to contribute to the national effort against Covid-19 and remain at the disposal of the minister of health and the Ministerial Advisory Committee in this regard.

"I want to also thank all those who have reached out to me personally during this unfortunate and trying time and especially to those who insisted on upholding the principles of academic freedom, which can only be of benefit to our country and all its people."

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