

Perth Group

How to resolve Aids dispute once and for all

In his speech at the International Human Rights Network symposium in Switzerland ("Mixed signals on Aids eroding confidence", *The Sunday Independent*, May 25), Professor Malegapuru Makgoba put the question "A nutrition handbook, an African potato and some red herrings - are these really South Africa's responses to the HIV/Aids epidemic?"

A better question necessitating an immediate answer is: why are nevirapine and AZT monotherapy good enough to treat South African women but not American women?

Makgoba expressed the view that "there has been a casting about for theories to contradict the orthodox scientific findings on HIV/Aids, such as the countenancing of 'discredited dissident theories'".

Scientific theories are discredited in scientific journals with scientific data.

For many years we have questioned the HIV theory of Aids and published alternative theories. Yet to date no HIV experts have published any scientific data which discredit our views.

On the contrary, they have done everything possible to prevent our publishing and continue to claim, as Makgoba reportedly said, "There is little doubt that HIV causes Aids."

In contrast, there is no evidence that common African conditions such as poverty, malnutrition and many chronic infectious diseases by themselves, singly or in combination, cause the characteristic immunodeficiency typical of Aids, that is, the progressive depletion of CD4+ cells. This is science through catechism and declaration.

It is a great pity Makgoba failed to consider the eminent HIV/Aids expert Plot and his group writing in *Lancet* in 1984: "Tuberculosis, protein-calorie malnutrition and various parasitic diseases can all be associated with depression of cellular immunity."

At the same time, similar views were expressed by other HIV/Aids experts such as Chumuck, Biggar and Quinn. As far back as 1987 Canadian researchers stressed that before the Aids era it was known that "In TB as well as in lepromatous leprosy, an immunosuppressive state will frequently develop in the host. This state is characterised by T lymphopenia with a decreased number of T helper cells [T4 cells] and an inverted T-helper/T-suppressor cell ratio ... Immunosuppression induced by the infection with *M. tuberculosis* can persist for life, even when the TB is not progressive."

The same researchers noted that TB was present "prior to infection with HIV [prior to the development of a positive antibody test] or development of overt Aids". (Before 1987 TB was not an Aids-defining disease.)

In other words, the presence of TB leads to a decrease in T4 cells, and the positive antibody test ("HIV infection") follows rather than precedes TB. In 1994 Essex and his colleagues proved that mycobacterial infections lead to the appearance of a positive antibody test, which HIV experts consider proof for HIV infection. They concluded that "Elisa and WB results [the two antibody tests used to prove HIV

infection] should be interpreted with caution when screening individuals infected with *M. tuberculosis* or other mycobacterial species" and that "Elisa and WB may not be sufficient for HIV diagnosis in Aids-endemic areas of central Africa, where the prevalence of mycobacterial diseases is quite high".

According to a 1998 *Lancet* editorial, the developing world "bears more than 90 percent of the global burden of HIV infection" and "tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of death worldwide among people with HIV". Professor Abdool Karim has written that in South Africa "Clinically pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) is the main presenting illness among HIV-infected persons."

If this is the case then the vast majority of cases of HIV/Aids can be eliminated simply by eradicating TB. This can only be achieved by abolishing poverty and its consequences.

Could Makgoba please provide us with one single scientific study with evidence proving HIV is the cause of Aids? With no effort spared to date we have been unable to find such a study.

Also could Makgoba cite one scientific study with the evidence which proves HIV has been isolated/purified and thus it exists?

According to Makgoba, "Scientific and political controversy over HIV/Aids in particular is also not new. In the late 1980s, for example, French and American scientists were locked in ugly battles about who first isolated the HI virus ... After detailed investigation and scrutiny of the scientific literature and laboratory notes, then presidents Ronald Reagan of the United States and Francois Mitterrand of France signed an agreement that credited Dr Robert Gallo and Dr Luc Montagnier as the co-discoverers of HIV."

Indeed, Montagnier's group in 1983 and Gallo's group in 1984 claimed to have isolated HIV, that is, to have obtained the HIV particles separate from everything else, namely to have purified the HIV virus. In 1997 the French investigative journalist Djamel Tahj interviewed Montagnier over his 1983 *Science* paper, where he claimed to have discovered HIV. After repeated questioning Montagnier gave the stunning response that in electron micrographs of what they called "purified virus", even after a "Roman effort" they could not find any particles with "the morphology typical of retroviruses".

He added: "I repeat we did not purify!" When Montagnier was asked if Gallo isolated/purified HIV, he replied "Gallo?? I don't know if he really purified. I don't believe so."

Lack of proof of HIV isolation/purification and thus of its existence by "the co-discoverers of HIV" led to the proposal of an isolation experiment at the July 2000 Presidential Aids Advisory Panel meeting in Johannesburg. This was to be carried out jointly by the Perth Group and HIV experts from South Africa. It was agreed by both sides, including Makgoba, that this experiment should be performed as proof for the existence of HIV in support of the most basic tenet of the HIV theory of Aids.

The cost of this experiment is insignificant compared with the amount the South African government spends on HIV/Aids. Since then, the HIV experts from South Africa, and especially Makgoba, have done everything possible to prevent this experiment being carried out. Why? Is this not the way to resolve the issue once and for all?

● Professor Sam Mhlongo, head and chief family practitioner, family medicine and primary health care, Medical University of South Africa, Johannesburg; Dr Valendar F Turner, consultant emergency physician, department of emergency medicine, Royal Perth Hospital, Perth; Dr John M Papadimitriou, professor of pathology, University of Western Australia, Perth; Dr Helman Alfonso, department of research, Universidad Metropolitana Barranquilla, Colombia; Barry AP Page, physicist, department of medical physics, Royal Perth Hospital, Perth; David Casner, physicist, department of medical physics, Royal Perth Hospital, Perth; Dr Christian Pitala, gynaecologist, department of obstetrics and gynaecology, General Public Hospital, Korneuburg, Austria; Eleni Papadopulos-Eleopulos, biophysicist, department of medical physics, Royal Perth Hospital, Perth

