

National Press Club nominates Zackie Achmat and TAC as Newsmakers for 2003

The National Press Club has named Zackie Achmat and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) Newsmaker of the Year for 2003. Public Prosecutor, Bulelani Ngcuka, is the runner up.

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Announcing the winner after an executive committee meeting, Press Club chairman Ben Rootman said Achmat had been a key figure in the TAC's successful campaigns for the rollout of antiretroviral drugs for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and more recently, for the treatment of people with HIV/AIDS.

Rootman said in Pretoria today the efforts of Achmat and the TAC had led to dramatic reductions in the price of antiretrovirals through voluntary price cuts by pharmaceutical companies and the acceptance of generic drugs. "The TAC's use of legal and moral arguments led to South Africa importing cheaper generics of AIDS drugs. This victory raised hope for millions of AIDS sufferers to finally gain access to drugs that could prolong their lives," he said.

Former president Mandela described Achmat as a national hero, saying he is an ordinary man whose extraordinary ways helped to save thousands of lives at the cost of his own.

Achmat continues to receive accolades in the national and international arena. He and the TAC have been nominated for the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, Achmat was featured as one of the 35 heroes of 2003 in Time Magazine and the TAC won an MTV FREE Your Mind Award in Germany. Locally, THISDAY daily newspaper named Achmat Person of the Year for 2003 and the Tshwane University of Technology honoured him with its Communicator of the Year award.

Rootman said a record number of nominations were received for the award. These included Happy Sindal Mac Maharaj and Mo Shaikh, the Springbok team and Kamp Staalraad and Hestrie Cloete. The decision was taken after much discussion and debate. Some factors, which were considered, included what impact the nominee had on the nation and the amount of news generated. This is based on publicity generated in both print and electronic media.

The Newsmaker of the Year title is registered in the name of the National Press Club. Previous recipients include President Thabo Mbeki, former Presidents Nelson Mandela and F W De Klerk, the South African / Force, the National Rugby Team, former cricket captain, the late Hansie Cronje, the South African Rand and a host of other prominent South Africans.

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