

Media Statement

27 November 2021

South Africa's response to travel restrictions imposed by several countries

The South African Government has noted the announcements by several countries to institute temporary travel restrictions on South Africa and other countries in our region.

This follows the detection of the new Omicron variant.

South Africa aligns itself with the World Health Organisation's position on the latest travel bans.

The World Health Organisation has pleaded with world leaders not to engage in knee-jerk reactions and has cautioned against the imposition of travel restrictions.

Dr Michael Ryan (WHO Head of Emergencies) has stressed the importance of waiting to see what the data will show.

"We've seen in the past, the minute there's any kind of mention of any kind of variation and everyone is closing borders and restricting travel. It's really important that we remain open, and stay focused," Ryan said.

We also note that new variants have been detected in other countries. Each of those cases have had no recent links with Southern Africa. It's worth noting that the reaction to those countries is starkly different to cases in Southern Africa.

This latest round of travel bans is akin to punishing South Africa for its advanced genomic sequencing and the ability to detect new variants quicker. Excellent science should be applauded and not punished. The global community needs collaboration and partnerships in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A combination of South Africa's capacity to test and its ramped-up vaccination programme, backed up by world class scientific community, should give our global partners the comfort that we are doing as well as they are in managing the pandemic. South Africa follows and enforces globally recognised COVID-19 health protocols on travel. No infected individuals are permitted to leave the country.

Minister Naledi Pandor said: "Whilst we respect the right of all countries to take the necessary precautionary measures to protect their citizens, we need to remember that this pandemic requires collaboration and sharing of expertise. Our immediate concern is the damage that these restrictions are causing to families, the travel and tourism industries and business".

South Africa has already started engaging countries that have imposed travel bans with the view to persuade them to reconsider.

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