

GUEST COLUMN



Young South Africans must explore the world with correct travel documents

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The recent return of young South Africans detained in different provinces of the People's Republic of China on violation of Chinese visa regulations must send a warning to young people that they must research and ensure that they have correct travelling documents before they explore opportunities across the world.

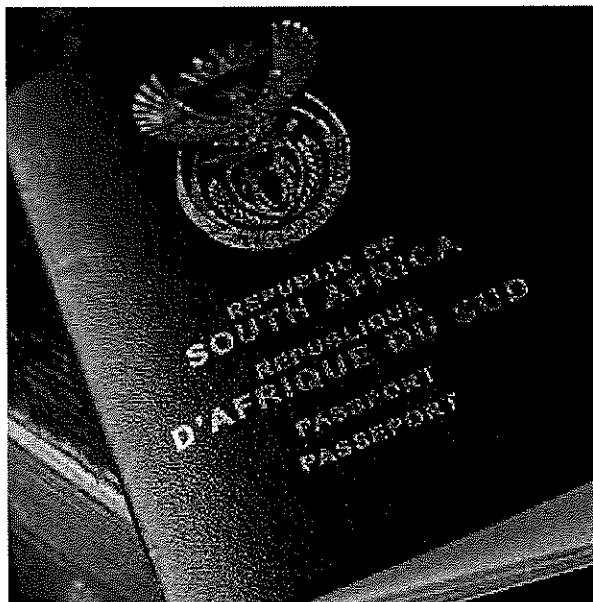
In 2019, more than 100 young South Africans travelled to China on student visas with the hope that when they arrive, they will get work visas and work in different schools and colleges to teach English and other subjects. However, as they later found out, the work visas never materialised and they ended up in police custody.

The stories from those returning from detention in China are varied from how they were treated to how they were detained, but there is a common thread through most of the stories: they were recruited in South Africa by fellow South Africans working with Chinese agents who promised them opportunities. They were convinced that they can travel with study visas and the work visa will be sorted when they arrive in China. It sounded that simple.

As we now know, many of them, if not all who travelled on student visas never received work visas on arrival in China. The agents disappeared and the schools did not assist much to secure them. In cases where visas were issued, some of the schools also violated the visa regulations by moving teachers to different schools across China, which resulted in a number of South Africans arrested in various provinces of China.

When the first group was arrested in May 2018, International Relations and Cooperation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu called on young South Africans to ensure that they have correct documents and when in doubt, to verify with the Chinese Embassy in Pretoria.

"I call on parents, guardians and young people themselves who seek to travel to explore opportunities across the world to make sure they have all the necessary travel documents and that the documents are valid before they travel. Young people must research. They must be curious enough to seek to know all details before they travel" Sisulu said at the time.



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The Minister added that South Africa has seen a rise in the number of young people, teachers, engineers, nurses and professionals being recruited across the world. "Due to our growing good bilateral relations with various countries, we are seeing many South African professionals leaving for better opportunities abroad, and we are very proud of that. We urge them to make sure that they have correct documents. Many countries require a work visa, and this can easily be obtained in all foreign embassies in South Africa," Sisulu said.

The Minister stressed that South Africans must not be shy to seek work experience in Africa and across the world. They must venture and explore. "The implementation of the Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (CFTA) and the growing trade within BRICS, and with Asia and the Gulf region, Europe and the Americas, will definitely open opportunities for skilled young South African professionals. They must seize these opportunities on the Continent and globally," she added.

Earlier this year, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) launched the Travel Smart Campaign to remind and also sensitise South Africans to have all the necessary documents, information and requirements of traveling before they depart.

"With the Travel Smart Campaign, we want South Africans to be alert, and to know the rules, laws and cultures of countries they seek to visit," Sisulu emphasised.

The key elements of the Campaign include reminding travellers to have travel and medical insurance and to verify their documents before they travel. South Africa has 125 missions across the world and all have recorded growing numbers of South Africans who are traveling for business, leisure and official duties. The numbers show that South Africans are exploring the world.

The Minister has directed South Africa's diplomats in China to continue to engage with the Chinese authorities to ensure that all young South Africans detained on visa violations are released as soon as possible and hope that no additional South Africans will fall for the same scam again.

- Ndivhuwo Mabaya is spokesperson and head of communications at Dirco.