



**MINISTRY: TOURISM**  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Minister Sisulu speaking notes at the United Nations World Tourism General Assembly**

**1 December 2021**

Thank you Programme Director for allowing me this opportunity to make an input on this important subject of current trends on international tourism. I am grateful for this opportunity.

I would like to express to this community that is responsible for world tourism, our agitation and disappointment at the random restrictions placed on South Africa and by extension most Southern Africa states, following South Africa's announcement that our scientists have discovered the latest Covid-19 variant, now named Omicron by the World Health Organisation.

We, like most countries, have assembled around our Government a team of highly specialised scientists to assist us understand the new variant. As the Cabinet of South Africa we sat and listened to a most impressive presentation of the study from our scientists. They had, of course, already reported this discovery to the World Health Organisation (WHO) as is required by the protocols. By then they had already announced their findings to the public. Their concern was that this new variant can mutate and as such was very dangerous. To our shock and horror, every country that responded to this matter went on to red-list South Africa and by extension most of the southern African countries that depend on us as a corridor to the world.

I would like to make it clear that Omicron is not a South African variant. It is a variant that was spotted and reported by brilliant South African scientists, so quickly that the world could not fully digest the message enough to understand what was being conveyed. The variant has been found in various places including Africa, Europe and Asia. According to WHO the variant has now been in several regions of the world several weeks before it was announced in South Africa.

For reasons that remain unknown to us several countries went on to impose travel restrictions on South Africa. Surprisingly, even Spain that hosts this UNWTO General Assembly, with all the immunities vested in UN organisations, red-listed most SADC countries, making it impossible for my colleagues in these countries to participate in this important event.

I am glad that WHO has taken a different approach and this is what they have said and I quote "the speed and transparency of the South African and Botswana Governments in informing the world about the new variant is to be commended". The Who stands with African countries which had the courage to share life-saving public health information.

I urge you all who are responsible for a very important sector of our economies - tourism, to follow the lead of the WHO. We will request countries that restricted us to lift the ban, because these actions are unjust and have the potential to destroy the tourism industry of the whole region.

There are many other ways that countries can protect their citizens. One is to ensure that the information they act on is reliable. They need to check this against the WHO because they have a responsibility to protect their own. But this does not mean the protection of their own at the expense of the denial of rights of others. These are not mutually exclusive concepts. Various measures can be put into place to ensure testing before flights, during flights and on arrival. This variant has been shown to be easily detectable through the same means that countries use to test Covid-19.

The denial of rights of other citizens cannot be supported by an organisation of the United Nations. Our job is to work together and ensure the sustainability of the world as we know it without infringement of the rights of others.

I need to emphasise that:

here and now, we must come to terms with the fact that finding solutions to protect ourselves should not be at the denial of the rights of others.

We would like to thank the Chairperson and members of the UNTWO for giving me this opportunity to make these inputs.