



EU business calls for reconsideration of travel restrictions on Southern Africa

The European Union Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Africa (EU Chamber) calls for reconsideration of the travel restrictions placed on South Africa and its neighbouring countries following the identification of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus. The EU Chamber fully supports the ongoing contribution being made by the world-class scientific and medical community in South Africa to the fight against COVID-19.

Whilst the EU Chamber appreciates the decision on the travel ban was not taken lightly by EU and other global leaders, we would have called for a more measured approach. Due to the limited data available at this stage, we agree with the World Health Organization's (WHO) call on countries to conduct further tests to determine Omicron's severity, immune responses and antibody neutralisation, among other things. All policy decisions of this magnitude related to the pandemic should be balanced and need to be based on scientific evidence and careful consideration of the implications for businesses and the livelihoods of people.

Only one month ago the leaders of the G20 nations set out a series of collective actions to help the world deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact. In the G20 Rome Declaration it was acknowledged that the tourism sectors in developing countries have been particularly hard-hit and that their 'rapid, resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery' is a priority. The countries of Southern Africa that have been subjected to new travel bans in the last few days have been dealt a blow that will further set back their economic recovery.

The European Union is the largest investor in South Africa and is committed to make an ongoing contribution to the inclusive economic development of this country and the region. "Travel restrictions are challenging not just for tourists but also for companies that are trading and have business operations in the region. The impact is wide-reaching and will have repercussions for months to come," said Rui Marto, President of the EU Chamber.

In his address to the nation on Sunday 28 November 2021, President Ramaphosa called on rich countries to support access to COVID-19 vaccines and to take positive steps to help developing economies instead of putting up more barriers, like travel restrictions. The EU Chamber supports this call and remains ready to play its part in encouraging vaccinations as well as adherence to effective measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.

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The members of the EU Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Africa include:

- Belgium Chamber of Commerce for Southern Africa
- Business Ireland Southern Africa
- Italian South African Chamber of Trade and Industry
- Nordic-South African Business Association
- South African Portuguese Chamber of Commerce
- Spanish Chamber of Commerce in South Africa

The French South African Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Southern African – German Chamber of Commerce and Industry are also associated to the comments presented in this submission.