**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY(NA)**

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**1826. Mr M Hlengwa (IFP) to ask the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation:**

1. Whether she has taken relevant steps to negotiate with her counterparts in the United Kingdom, in order to mitigate the effect of the Republic being placed on the United Kingdom ’s travel red list, and the impact it is having on the relations between the two nations (details furnished ); if not, why not; if so, what are the full relevant details;
2. Whether she and the Minister of Tourism have liaised on the matter; if not, why not; if so, what are the full relevant details† **NW2040E**

**REPLY:**

1. Yes, my Department is currently engaging with the government of the United Kingdom (UK) of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to raise this matter within the context of our strategic bilateral relationship. Such matters form part of our ongoing engagements and exchange of views on bilateral, regional and global issues that present challenges and opportunities to both our countries. The UK has placed South Africa on the Red List meaning that both SA and UK travellers face heavy restrictions when travelling to the UK. South Africa being placed on the Red List has caused distress to many South Africans living in the UK who are unable to attend funerals of loved ones in South Africa as well as visit sick family members due to the punitive costs of mandatory quarantine they would bear on their return to the UK. The travel restrictions on travellers from South Africa has also severely impacted trade and tourism between South Africa and the UK.

In my most recent meeting with Foreign Secretary Raab, the issue of mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our economies was indeed discussed and we agreed that we need to continue our collaboration on how to best deal with this scourge.

South Africa’s High Commission in London has also held discussions with the Office of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Africa) at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mr James Duddridge in this regard.

The severe constraints in travel have prompted the South African expat community and others in the UK to launch a petition in order for this matter to be debated in the House of Commons. For a debate in the Commons to take place, 10 000 signatures *are* required. The petition has now been signed by more than 10 000 people.

As Government, we firmly believe that our country must be removed from this Red List as soon as possible and this is based on a number of issues:

* 1. Government has launched an extensive public awareness campaign on the Covid-19 virus and South Africans are taking the necessary precautions to prevent the virus from spreading. The government vaccine rollout is fully on track, and many South Africans have had their first jab of the Pfizer vaccine and are awaiting their second jabs, while the number of people opting for the One Shot J&J vaccine is also on the increase. Having covered the most-at- risk demographics, the government recently announced that the 18-34 year olds can now get vaccinated.
  2. The South African government continuously monitors the Covid 19 situation and has established testing sites all over the country which are easily accessible to the general population.
  3. Statistics indicate that Covid figures have decreased steadily.
  4. The South African government has now downgraded the country to Level 3 (from level 4) due to the encouraging statistics. Restrictions are consequently relaxed.
  5. South Africa has recently successfully hosted the British and Irish Lions tour where all Covid protocols were observed.

1. South Africa’s Covid-19 response remains a government-wide intervention. In this regard, Minister Sisulu and I are conscious that the United Kingdom (UK) is South Africa’s number one source of long-haul tourism in the world, a position it has not relinquished for the past 18 years. The travel restrictions on British passport holders during the lockdown and subsequent period have caused the numbers of British tourists to SA to reduce drastically for the year 2020 and the first half of 2021, which has negatively impacted on the tourism sector. Plans are being finalised for Government to significantly increase its lobbying efforts to ensure that South Africa is removed from the UK’s Red List soonest.

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