**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY:**

**Question Number: 2495**

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**Ms H S Winkler (DA) to ask the Minister of Tourism:**

How does her department intend to communicate on the latest COVID-19 C.1.2 variant which was discovered in the Republic by scientists in May 2021 to avoid further international brand damage to the country? NW2916E

# REPLY:

The minister maintains dialogues with her international Tourism counterparts and holds regular engagements with sector stakeholders as well as through the media to ensure the world that South Africa is open for tourists and all measures are in place ensure tourist’s safety.

Whenever a new variant is discovered, South African Tourism, an entity of the Department, through its international SAT hubs keeps global tourism consumers regularly updated with information as shared by the National Department of Health. This is to prevent damaging misinformation in market countries.

Furthermore, through the Global Advocacy Programme, engagements are held with critical stakeholders such as the diplomatic community and other decision makers with the aim of ensuring that there is greater clarity about the actual situation and the associated scientific facts. This approach has yielded good results in relation to the earlier delta variant and this approach will be pursued going forward.

On 25 November 2021, South Africa’s National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) announced the detection of a new variant of the SARS-COV-2 following genomic sequencing. This variant was detected as the Gauteng province was experiencing a sudden increase in COVID-19 cases and the same variant was concurrently detected in Botswana and in Hong-Kong. On 26 November the WHO Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution named this variant of concern Omicron.

It is now known that by the 5th November 2021, a total of 635 Omicron cases had been detected and reported by 37 countries across all continents, of which 228 were detected in South Africa and 143 cases in the United Kingdom.

The Department is working in partnership with the private sector to ensure health and safety protocols are in place. SA Tourism is driving a global information strategy which is also informing the global consumer that South Africa is not the breeding ground of new variants but simply has the scientific ability to identify them.