



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. LAZARUS MCCARTHY CHAKWERA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI, AND CHAIRPERSON OF SADC,
ON TRAVEL BANS IMPOSED BY COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD ON
SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES AS A RESULT OF THE DISCOVERY
OF A NEW VARIANT OF THE CORONA VIRUS**

02 DECEMBER 2021

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has learned with great concern and disappointment about the rushed decision taken by some countries, essentially in Europe and North America to ban travel to and from eight Southern African Countries, including Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

While we recognise the legitimate principle for each country to protect its population and minimize the risk of importation of new variants of COVID-19, we condemn the knee jerk reaction that followed South Africa's ground breaking discovery of the new variant. The Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus has so far been reported in 23 countries around the world, just under 2 weeks after the announcement by the Republic of South Africa.

It is now known that the new variant was already present in various western countries before its discovery by South Africa, including the Netherlands, which have not been subjected to a travel ban. Yet even southern African countries that have not reported a single case of the variant, such as Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi and Mozambique have been red-listed for international travel.

We denounce this apparent targeting of countries in our region and reiterate that the travel bans are a show of lack of global solidarity and in contradiction to the International Health Regulations (2005), that mandate countries to share information on diseases of major public health concern, in a timely manner.

What the Republic of South Africa did, alerting the world about the existence of a new variant that was already circulating around the world, was commendable. I especially congratulate the Scientists from the Republic of South Africa for the speed with which they notified the World Health Organisation about the new variant.

Scientists around the world agree that travel bans will have no impact in reducing the spread of the new variant. Rather, the immediate results of this action are very clear, they are hurting an already fragile tourism sector, reducing the transportation of essential goods including the much needed vaccines and test kits for COVID-19, and accelerating the contraction of economies in the region as a whole.

It is unfortunate that these measures have been imposed without any reference to scientific evidence and are clearly discriminatory and unfair to the citizens of our region. These measures will embolden sceptics of COVID-19 vaccines, and seriously affect the vaccine uptake not only in Southern Africa but also in the continent and beyond.

We call upon all countries that have imposed the travel bans on Southern Africa to rescind their decisions to avoid further economic damage to our region and elsewhere and to avoid further hampering multilateral efforts to end this global pandemic. We reiterate our commitment to international economic cooperation going forward, in support of our regional integration and call for enhanced solidarity during crises of all forms, including climate change, natural disasters and pandemics.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and commit to continue supporting their efforts to address all challenges caused by this pandemic, put their countries back on the path of economic recovery, and build back better as a region.



**H.E Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera,
President of the Republic of Malawi,
and Chairperson of SADC**

02 December 2021