



Namibia Tourism Board

NAMIBIA TOURISM BOARD

REMARKS

BY

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**AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE "THE TOURISM SECTOR DRIVE FOR
COVID-19 VACCINATION"**

18th JANUARY 2022

WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

SALUTATIONS

- Hon Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism
- Ms Madelein /Goagoses, Chairperson of NTB
- Executive Directors present
- Senior Government Officials present
- Tourism Industry Stakeholders
- Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen
- All Protocol observed

Whatever the opinion is on the COVID-19 vaccines, there is no question that a country's rate of vaccination will play a crucial role in travel recovery, traveller confidence, and positioning of the country as a 'safe' tourism destination.

Some operators within the tourism industry have already started implementing their own vaccination policies supporting mandatory injections (they require all their staff and customers to be fully vaccinated) and are sharing with would be travelers as a means to attract visitors by given promise for their safety. We cannot blame them for being proactive with such a policy because many customers are asking about their vaccination policy, and some vaccinated travellers want assurances that everyone they will encounter during their trip is also vaccinated.

Whether we like it or not, vaccine passports or cards are coming. And even if Namibia never makes vaccinations mandatory and do not require tourists to be fully vaccinated to enter Namibia, it is highly likely that the vaccination policies of individual tourism companies or businesses will become an important differentiator in customers' buying decisions.

Having said that, in the context of tourism recovery, while the overwhelming sentiment and the (incorrect) public perception is that unvaccinated people present a risk to vaccinated people, there is no doubt that getting vaccinated,

and asking all staff to get vaccinated, will benefit our Namibia tourism destination and Namibia's reputation, and will help tourism recovery.

So how do we respond? What is the way forward?

I believe it is perfectly reasonable to encourage (but not force) frontline tourism staff to get vaccinated. Even though their vaccine does not really protect others, there is no doubt that having fully vaccinated frontline tourism staff inspires confidence among travellers and will be good for our destination. It becomes a selling point and will help our marketing. For those who have no valid reason not to get vaccinated, I urged them to be vaccinated as it is in their own interest and that of their loved ones.

At the national level it is important that government works with industry and its stakeholders, so everyone understands the benchmarks that need to be achieved to facilitate the lifting of travel restrictions. But such benchmarks or regulations must be consistently applied without any ambiguity to avoid confusion in the marketplace.

Lastly, in my view, the global tourism industry should unite in its condemnation of the disproportionate travel restrictions response we have seen to this pandemic, which has decimated the travel industry. Case in point is United Arab Emirates who is hosting the world debut Dubai Expo, yet the residents of the southern African countries are excluded to enter that country. Initially, concession was made that those participating at the World Expo could enter with the Special Permits, but this too has been of late indefinitely suspended except for national day's events of various countries. Hence, Namibia's plans to shift the tourism week now to the second week February is seemingly far-fetch dream if this matter is not resolved urgently at the protocol level, or we might as well all together forget about it. This is just a fuss and defeats all the energy and planning.

Recovery is critical, and digital vaccine passports for travel purposes are inevitable as the industry starts to recover. They **MUST** be implemented. But perhaps with some lobbying we can ensure they will allow anyone to travel who is vaccinated, or has a negative test result, or a medical exemption, or proof of recovery from COVID-19.