

President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

December 8 2021

Dear President Biden:

Following the identification of the Omicron variant by Botswana and South Africa, the U.S. along with several other governments announced travel bans targeting 8 Southern African countries.

This knee-jerk response has effectively punished the world-class scientific leadership in Botswana and South Africa because scientists in those countries identified and sequenced this variant first and decided to share those data immediately with the rest of the world.

Their selflessness has been met not with praise and gratitude but with racist and xenophobic travel bans that have no basis in evidence.

Although testing and surveillance of air travelers might be appropriate, selective travel bans are ineffectual and punishing to the targeted countries. Of note, there is already documented evidence of community spread in the U.S.

Your administration has pledged to lead with public health, evidence and human rights in its response to COVID-19. Your travel bans, like the travel bans pursued by your predecessor, are inconsistent with that promise.

Extreme global inequities in COVID-19 vaccine and treatment access have created the conditions that allow variants such as Omicron to flourish. And travel bans not only cause harm to targeted countries—they also distract from the real work required to defeat COVID-19. We therefore call on you to:

- 1) Immediately lift the bans on travel from Mozambique, South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe to the United States and call on other governments to do the same;
- 2) Engage in all means of diplomatic and political pressure to secure a substantive waiver of intellectual property rights for vaccines and therapeutics for COVID-19, to overcome the deadlock and delay at the World Trade Organisation; and
- 3) Support the South Africa-WHO mRNA technology transfer hub, which will enable local mRNA vaccine production and serve as a learning site for global manufacturers, including by using your authority under law and contract to share NIH-Moderna vaccine information and technology with the world.

Signed,



Full list of organizational endorsers in alphabetical order:

Advocacy Network for Africa
Africa Faith and Justice Network
Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC), UK
Be a Hero
California Trade Justice Coalition
Center for Public Health and Human Rights, Johns Hopkins University
Daily Kos
Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research (FIAR)
Fundación IFARMA, Colombia
Good Nature Publishing
Health GAP
Health Justice
Hesperian Health Guides
Justice is Global
Kamukunji Paralegal Trust (KAPLET)
Oxfam America
Matahari Global Solutions
Midtown South Community Council
National Birth Equity Collective
Partners in Health
People's Action
People's Health Movement South Africa
Physicians for Human Rights
Public Citizen
PrEP4All
Progressive Doctors
RESULTS
Right to Health Action
Society for International Development
Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), South Africa
Treatment Action Group (TAG)
Universities Allied for Access to Essential Medicines (UAEM)
University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
Washington University in St. Louis

Individual endorsers include:

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