



27 APRIL 2020

NEWSLETTER ON THE REPATRIATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS

#Repatriation #FreedomDay #UnitedInOurFreedom



With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed by countries across the globe, which included the almost complete cessation of flights, about 4 500 South Africans found themselves stranded. These included South Africans who had contracts in foreign countries and found themselves unemployed as the economic impact of the pandemic deepened. The overwhelming majority were tourists holidaying abroad.

With the announcement by the German Government that they would repatriate over 6 000 German and other European Union visitors, an opportunity presented itself to collaborate with the German Government to repatriate South Africans. The Brazilian, Canadian and Belgian governments have also chartered South African Airways (SAA) flights and those flights were also used to repatriate South Africans stranded in Latin America. These flights were also re-routed from Frankfurt to a number of cities on the African continent.



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STAY HOME
SAVE SOUTH AFRICA

“We have to balance the need to resume economic activity with the imperative to contain the virus and save lives ...

“Our borders will remain closed to international travel, except for the repatriation of South African nationals and foreign citizens.”

President Cyril Ramaphosa
24 April 2020

More than 2 000 South Africans have been repatriated to date.
Over 250 South Africans have crossed over land borders from neighbouring states.



LATEST ARRIVALS

21 April 2020

- ✈ A private charter flight of Saudi Air arrived in Johannesburg with 93 South Africans repatriated from Saudi Arabia.
- ✈ A private charter with 83 South Africans arrived in Johannesburg from Pakistan.

23 April 2020

- ✈ A SAA flight re-routed through Cairo, Egypt repatriated 25 South Africans.
- ✈ A private charter flight from Saudi Air arrived in Johannesburg from Saudi Arabia with 60 passengers on board.
- ✈ A special charter flight from the Democratic Republic of Congo landed in Johannesburg with 11 passengers on board.

24 April 2020

- ✈ A special charter flight from Zambia landed in Johannesburg with 23 passengers on board.
- ✈ A special charter flight from Zambia with two South Africans on board.

25 April 2020

- ✈ A special charter flight from the Seychelles arrived in Johannesburg with 23 passengers on board.
- ✈ An Emirates Air flight that repatriated 165 South Africans from Dubai.
- ✈ The last SAA flight from Frankfurt, chartered by the German Government, arrived in Johannesburg with 160 passengers on board.
- ✈ A special charter flight repatriated nine South Africans from Guinea Conakry.



Negotiations and arrangements continue in earnest to repatriate all destitute South Africans

- Most South Africans stranded in Europe have been evacuated. There are a few South Africans still stranded in Portugal as they were unable to make it to Frankfurt for repatriation flights.
- Around 1 164 South Africans remain stranded in Asia, primarily in Thailand, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and Malaysia. Three South Africans are also stranded in Nepal. Around 400 South Africans are stranded in Australia.
- In Africa, around 376 South Africans are still stranded in Cote d’ Ivoire, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Mauritius, Uganda, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal and Zambia.
- Despite a charter flight repatriating over 300 South Africans from the USA, around 300 more remain stranded.

“We are making every effort to support the return of South Africans who find themselves stranded overseas. We are working closely with governments. Some are very reluctant to allow flights in because they too are in lockdown. We’ve had to exercise patience, it is a matter of negotiation. We are really working hard at this. It is a very challenging situation.” – Dr Naledi Pandor

In the News

International Relations and Cooperation Minister, Dr Naledi Pandor, was interviewed by JJ Tabane on *Newzroom Afrika*
20 April 2020

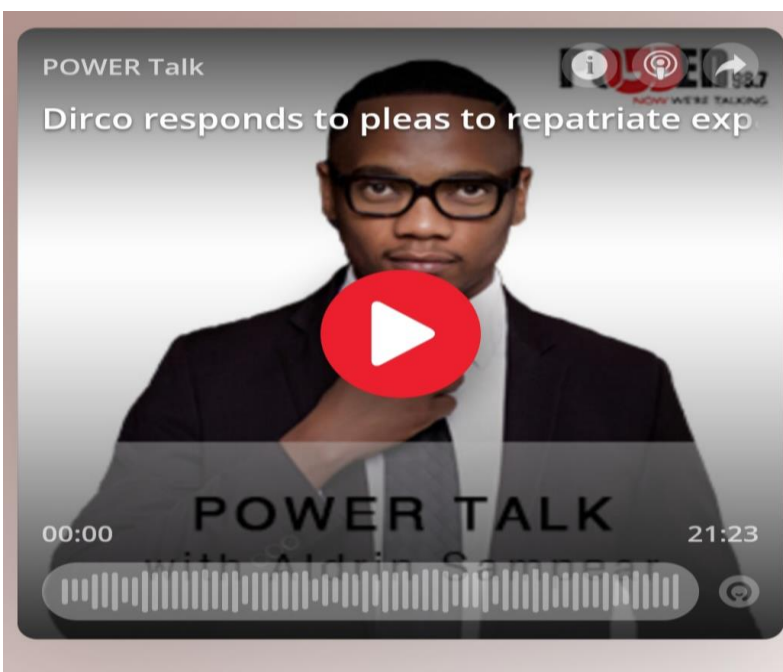
View the full interview on:
<https://youtu.be/0FwmrTUA4kQ>



DIRCO responds to pleas to repatriate expats
Power Talk with Aldrin Sampear
24 April 2020

Following discussions between the radio station and South Africans in the United States and Hong Kong in need of repatriation, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) spokesperson, Clayson Monyela, responded to some of the concerns raised, how DIRCO was dealing with the situation and outlined the assistance that was being provided to those stuck in foreign countries.

Listen to the full interview on: <https://omny.fm/shows/powertalk-archive/dirco-responds-to-pleas-to-repatriate-expats>



Dirco responds to pleas to repatriate expats

A personal account: A South African stranded in Italy

A repatriation story by Amelia Bowers

Amelia Bowers is a South African citizen who was stranded in Italy following the total lockdown in that country and the subsequent lockdown in South Africa. Amelia has given the department permission to publish her personal account of the repatriation back to South Africa. The article has been shortened.

“The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and South African Airways (SAA) were busy with dozens of repatriation flights to and from South Africa, and they have to be commended for what they were able to achieve...it is an absolute logistical nightmare. Little things we didn't realise, like SAA not having landing rights in Italy (it isn't one of their destinations) are the type of things they had to arrange. ”

Getting on a flight

After Alitalia cancelled their tickets and South Africa also closed its borders, Amelia thought it wise to register their presence with the South African Embassy in Italy.

“On 7 April, the Embassy called us to let us know they were planning a repatriation flight back. They wanted to know if we were interested and if we had the funds to pay for our tickets back. They took all of our details (my SA passport and Kevin's permanent residence) and said they would be in touch.

“On 9 April, they let us know that a flight was planned for 13 April, and that the cost was R12 000 per person, which needed to be paid by 11am Saturday, 11 April. There were also forms to sign detailing two weeks’ government quarantine and permission for the Government to test us for COVID-19.

“That night 8 pm, the flight was cancelled. I cried all that night and half of Easter Sunday. On Tuesday, 14 April, we received another email stating that another flight was planned for Friday, 17 April, but that every passenger had to bring with proof from a registered medical doctor that they did not have COVID-19. It is absolutely impossible to get this. COVID-19 tests are for those who meet the symptoms criteria. Several of the stranded South Africans let the Embassy know this and the flight was off again.

“On Thursday, 16 April, at lunch time I received an e-ticket from SAA. About an hour later, I received documents from the Embassy giving permission for Kevin and I to travel through roadblocks to Rome. Other passengers I had connected with via the mailing list were able to get trains and internal flights using their embassy documents. But still no ticket for Kevin. I checked my email every 30 minutes, and sent emails. Nothing. Bad night's sleep! The next morning, Dad started phoning people he knew in South Africa and was able to confirm both Kevin and myself were on the planned flight.

“The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and SAA were busy with dozens of repatriation flights to and from South Africa, and they have to be commended for what they were able to achieve ... it is an absolute logistical nightmare. Little things we didn't realise, like SAA doesn't have landing rights in Italy (it isn't one of their destinations), are the type of things they had to arrange.

“With still no ticket in hand for Kevin, and a voice note in Italian for the Police at the roadblocks (to explain we don't have a printer and our documents are on our phone), we headed to Rome. While we were on our way, Refilwe at the Embassy in Rome was working on getting Kevin's ticket for us from SAA.

The flight

“When Kevin and I arrived at Fiumicino, after a bit of a drive around, we managed to find the Avis car rental drop-off.

“At T3, we had a cup of coffee before going to the info desk. We did ask a few staff members for T5 and SAA and they all looked at us like we were crazy. They assured us T5 was closed (it is the cargo terminal apparently), and SAA didn't fly to Rome. The woman at the info counter let us know that we couldn't get to the Cargo terminal on foot. She phoned them and told us they would send a shuttle around 6 pm (about 90 mins away).

“As we spotted South Africans wandering past, we called them over and I was in contact with a few people on WhatsApp to let them know where we were. Around that time, some people who were in contact with the Milan Embassy received an SMS that the flight had been delayed from 21h30 to 23h30. There were a few youngsters there (from 18 to about 22). Thank goodness for that! They found a place open in arrivals on the lower floor that was selling beer and wine. So, we got ourselves a drink and settled in to wait, everyone sharing their stories of how they ended up stuck in Italy.

“A shuttle fetched our small group (some of us had gotten toasted sandwiches when we heard about the delay) and took us to T5 where Italian Health Department officials waited fully kitted out in Hazmat suits. They processed us into lines. Our temperature was taken and added to our file. Busses arrived with large groups of South Africans who had been quarantined on cruise ships (and then hotels) since 9 March. Quite a few very frail and elderly.

“Eventually, we could check our suitcases onto the plane (we manually pushed them through a big scanner in the corner of the airport) and we got our boarding passes. Only then did it feel official! Shortly after that, our plane was delayed for a further two hours to 1:30 am.

“Finally, we went through passport control and got onto the busses to go to the plane (in all queues, a 2-m distance was enforced) and the busses were half filled. There was a delay on the tarmac while we waited for the assisted passengers to be raised in a special lift and seated. Then the Hazmat suited SAA staff processed us onto the plane. Our temperature was taken again.

“Our seating on the plane was alternate rows and two seats between each person. We were instructed to strictly stay in our seats. SAA staff slept in Business Class and their toilets were off limits to passengers.

“The plane was further delayed while we waited for the new flight plan to be approved and we finally took off at about 2:45 am. After the doors were closed, they played *Africa* by Toto over the loudspeakers to great applause from all of us on board. A very emotional moment. Kevin stayed up and had dinner at about 3:30 am. I chose to sleep! For those wondering, no alcohol was served on the flight. In the middle of the night, I woke to a staff member in full Hazmat taking my temperature. Bright blue light!

“At about 10h30, they put on the lights and served us breakfast. Our temperatures were taken again. Once the plane landed close to 12, we were instructed to remain seated. The staff waved goodbye to *My African Dream* ... another tearful moment. The South African Health Department boarded and documented our temperatures again and we were disembarked 20 passengers at a time. We were issued with fresh masks on disembarking by the Health Department.

“From there through passport control, then back out to the tarmac into mini busses (10 people per 20 seater). We each collected our own bag on the tarmac and loaded it into the bus' trailer. We then drove in convoy with a police escort to the quarantine location.

The thank you's

“Firstly, thanks to every single friend on Facebook for your kindness and support over the last few weeks. The messages, the phone calls, the laughter and prayers – all greatly appreciated.

“To our family and friends: you are our rocks. You all know who you are!

“To our Italy support team, who have become friends in the last few months: Gianfranco, Manolo, Tracey and Vincenzo, grazie per tutto. Arrivederci! Speriamo di rivederti presto!!! Già ci manca l'Italia.

“To the SA Embassy in Rome, specifically Refilwe Addo, for making sure we were safely on the plane, right up to seeing us off at T5. And to the rest of DIRCO staff for organising this. Thanks Reinhard and Gert for helping Dad with info. Thanks to Mr Naidoo at DIRCO for his help. And thanks to Megan's friend at DIRCO for following our progress and letting her know we were safe and healthy.

“To SAA staff, both on the ground planning the flight and the cheerful, professional staff on board, thank you. Special thanks to Corlie for making sure Captain van Rensburg checked on us (we were sleeping and missed it) and for following our flight on the flight tracker all the way home.

“To the airport staff in Rome and South Africa for making everything run smoothly.

“To the health departments in Italy and South Africa ... we salute you.”

DID YOU KNOW?

The Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA), through its three major international airports, has facilitated the evacuation and repatriation of around 14 000 passengers from 1 April 2020. Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula said the evacuation and repatriation of people were facilitated through OR Tambo International Airport, Cape Town International Airport and King Shaka International Airport. More flights are departing on a daily basis.

"The evacuation and repatriation flights were permitted in terms of the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs regulations, allowing foreign nationals stranded in South Africa to return to their respective countries and South Africans stranded abroad to come back home.

"Adherence to Coronavirus safety regulations and hygiene measures remained a priority in the evacuation and repatriation processes. Relevant stakeholders implemented the screening, testing, isolation and quarantine guidelines, to ensure the safety of all involved," said Minister Mbalula.

He called on aviators, particularly pilots and drone owners, to comply with the Disaster Management Act's regulations and directions aimed at preventing the spread of the novel Coronavirus. The plea follows reports of a surge in the number of applications for permission to fly remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), commonly referred to as drones.

"The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) has also received a handful of requests from small private aircraft owners requesting permission to fly their aircraft for various business-related activities, including farm owners wanting to fly into various provinces to check on operations," said Minister Mbalula. He appealed to aircraft owners for cooperation.

THE DIRCO CONSULAR INCIDENT COMMAND CENTRE making it happen behind the scenes

Ongoing efforts to facilitate the repatriation of South Africans are coordinated between the Department of International Relations and Cooperation's Consular Incident Command Centre and all the South Africans Missions abroad.



I know you are very busy, but please allow me to convey my gratitude to you and the rest of your department for what you are doing for South Africans abroad. I am in Saudi, but are not in a crisis, but I am praying for all my fellow South African's who are abroad, anxious and worried.

Keep up the good work, and be assured that you are all in my prayers.

Best Regards
Lourens Groenewald

My name is Natasha Beyers and it is with sincere gratitude and appreciation, on behalf of our entire family, that I write this email.

My family were among the 40 some-odd citizens stranded in Egypt. What a frightening, stressful and emotionally draining experience we all had trying to figure out a way to get them home.

I won't bore you with the details but I will say this - I am very aware that once people are back home, the only feeling one has is relief and it's easy to forget that something like repatriation, does not happen overnight.

However, I want to assure you and all involved, that we will not forget. We will always remember the hard work and determination of EVERYONE INVOLVED to bring our family home.

We thank you once again.

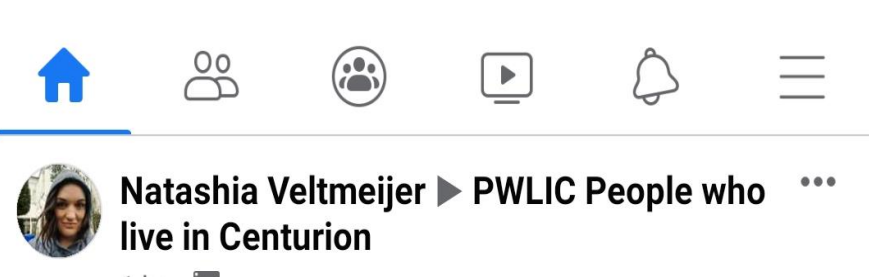
On behalf of The Beyers/Laloo Family,
Natasha Beyers



DENEL EMPLOYEES RETURN SAFELY FROM SPAIN @DIRCO_ZA @DPE_ZA @eNCA @News24 @defenceWeb_Afr @Newzroom405



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We just arrived in JHB from Frankfurt in our repatriation flight with SAA. I am So Impressed with all cabin crew, workers on the floor, front line and most importantly our SA Embassy. The work that you guys have done and still do now is absolutely amazing!! Im honestly so happy and impressed with everything to keep us safe.

When we arrived at OR Tambo our bags were already out and was on the tarmac. We grab our back and the split us up into the busses. The police that escorted us, the drivers everyone was keeping us informed when they took us to our quarantine destination.

I dont have any words to explain how proud I feel right now. I salute our President and I thank everyone else who helps to keep us on track 🙏

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"This is a crucial moment in our struggle against the coronavirus.

It is a time for caution.

It is a time to act responsibly.

It is a time for patience."

- President Cyril Ramaphosa

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