



**public enterprises**

Department:  
Public Enterprises  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **DPE WILL NOT BE HELD TO RANSOM BY DISGRUNTLED PILOTS ON SAA FLIGHT TO BRUSSELS TO BRING BACK VACCINE DOSES**

**PRETORIA 26 February 2021** – Once again a minority of South African Airways (SAA) pilots tried to protect their own self-interests and pockets by attempting to discredit a flight to transport vaccines back into the country to protect health workers from the Covid19 pandemic.

This flight was also a test relaunch of the SAA Cargo business. Many airlines around the world, including Lufthansa and Ethiopian, have intensified their cargo businesses while the passenger loads declined sharply, in order to bring in revenue. There will be many such flights by SAA in the months to come. This will also include transport of vaccines from manufacturers to African countries during the next months.

For many years SAA has proved that the cargo business has merit and value to serve the interests of customers and the country's economic development. The Brussels flight to bring back the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is proof that a restructured and well-managed airline operated in a professional and sustainable manner can support key economic sectors – including travel, tourism and even cargo to solidify South Africa as an African gateway to international markets.

This relaunch of the cargo business serves many purposes: increase the volumes of cargo transported by SAA into and out of SA; ensure that sovereign logistics capacity is sustained – just as when repatriation flights to bring back home South Africans stranded in various parts of the world under level 5 lockdown.

Over time cargo will become a profitable business. Partnerships with private sector will be considered at the appropriate time. These flights will become commercially viable.

The current flight carried goods to Brussels and will bring back the vaccine and more cargo on the return leg and this was to ensure that the flight and the overall operation is cost effective.

Claims by detractors, including officials of the South African Airways Pilots Association (SAAPA) and a small clique of “commentators” that the flight was an expensive exercise are devoid of the truth and only seeks to sabotage ongoing strategic role of SAA Cargo in the national effort to transport vaccines and other valuable cargo into the country.

At the moment SAAPA members, who have been locked out since the 18<sup>th</sup> of December last year because no agreement could be reached on ending an apartheid-era Regulating Agreement (RA) (in existence since 1988). SAAPA are only representing a minority of pilots.

SAAPA has done everything in its power to discredit the commencement of flights at SAA because it is happening without their members. They have raised unfounded allegations of safety in the last week regarding the preparations for vaccine repatriation flight.

They are now raising a new allegation about the financial viability of the flight. This is all being done to protect the extortionist Regulatory Agreement, which ensured that pilots who are 11% of SAA staff get a massive 65% of the salary bill, and certain strategic decisions at the airline could not be effected without their consent.

For the DPE and SAA Business Rescue Practitioners, the agreement is not only unlawful because it holds back the transformation and does not allow progress of black pilots as designated in the Employment Equity Act.

The DPE intend to make sure that the RA will not carry on into the future. By providing this kind unwarranted attack on SAA Cargo, this minority pilot group is holding SAA to hostage and attempting to destroy the very employer who could provide them with the continuation of their professional practise in years to come. It is short-sighted and self-destructive.

One can only marvel at the dishonesty of SAAPA who in the past argued that SAA would make money by running a cargo business, yet the association is now hell-bent on sabotaging the transportation of vaccine and other cargo back into the country.

SAAPA has to decide whether they are going to be part of the solution to the restoration of SAA as a world-class African airline or they are going to be an obstruction to the attainment of this objective. The association should take heed of the exodus of their members that have chosen to organise separately and embrace the new SAA vision, and not be trapped in the mindless war of attrition being waged by SAAPA.

The DPE is intent on ensuring that SAA is a sustainable and cost effective airline and the cargo business grows substantially.

The DPE will not be black-mailed by SAAPA and their greedy habits.

For Media Enquiries contact; Richard Mantu 072 488 1520

**Issued by Department of Public Enterprises  
26 February 2021.**