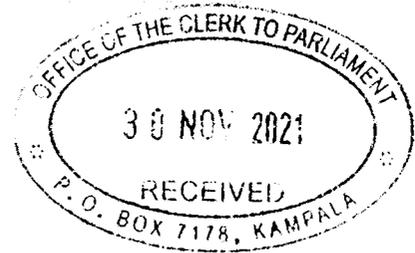




**OFFICE OF THE
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**



**STATEMENT BY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ON THE
RESPONSE TO OMICRON A NEW COVID-19 VARIANT**

Moved under Rule 53(1) of the Rules of Procedure

NOVEMBER 2021

The newly discovered COVID-19 variant named Omicron has raised concern across the globe. This latest covid-19 variant is reported to have originally been recorded in South Africa. It has so far been detected and recorded in countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany and Israel among others.

Concern has been raised on the possibility that the new variant may be more devastating than the delta variant to which a number of lives of Ugandans were lost during the second wave.

The risk is made more eminent given the low vaccination rate in the country. So far only 749,126 people have been fully vaccinated against the eligible population of 22 million. This translates to a vaccination rate of just 3.4%¹.

Hence any upsurge as noticed in the past two waves would cause enormous strain on health facilities, loss of lives, economic and social disruptions as well as depression. It would also lead to further loss of jobs, continued disruption of learning, escalated teenage pregnancies and limited movements in case of heightened lockdown measures.

It is crucial therefore that the country undertakes necessary measures to detect, prevent spreading of the new Omicron variant and to the worst contain it.

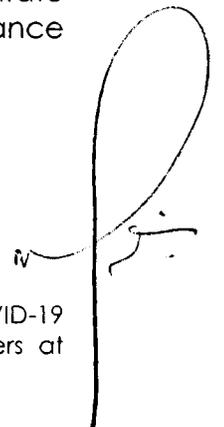
Given the fact that at the moment there is no indication that omicron variant is within Uganda, the country should harness the window of opportunity to limit its entry into the country.

Proposed Interventions

a) Formation of Joint East African Community Taskforce

A Joint East African Community Taskforce should be formed by Member states to develop a common approach towards the handling of the Omicron variant. At the moment the national taskforces of the Member states are implementing uncoordinated interventions. This has in the recent past been noted in the stances towards vaccination and continuation of learning. Aware that Member states are challenged by porous borders that facilitate uncontrolled movements, a coordinated approach would enhance measures towards management of COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Ministry of Health, 2021. Press Statement - Update on the accelerated Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign and Mandatory COVID-19 Testing of all Inbound Passengers at Entebbe International Airport



b) Develop Red List

In consultation with other Member States in the East African Community, Uganda should develop a red list of countries from which travellers are momentarily not allowed to access the country. A month's restriction is realistic for it will enable the government attain sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Omicron Variant. This would enable continued travels into and out of the country with limited disturbance to the global supply chain and tourism sector.

c) Parish Vaccination Clinics

While the vaccination campaign has been intensified in urban areas particularly at places of worship, markets and taxi parks, the effort is not commensurate in rural areas. It has been noted that there is low mobilization in local governments. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the designated vaccination centres are largely health centre III's that are inaccessible to many people in the countryside. Hence the need to undertake vaccination clinics at Parish level. This would require temporal recruitment of medical personnel to service all parishes in the countryside. This will supplement existing interventions.

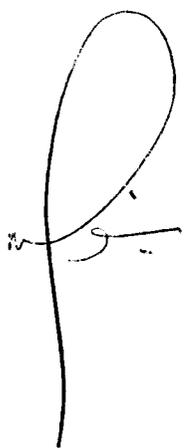
d) Allocate a Minimum of 5 Genexpert machines at each point of entry

During the last ministerial statement delivered by the Minister of Health², Parliament was informed that Entebbe International Airport has only 2 genexpert machines with capacity to perform 32 PCR tests per each machine per hour. Given the fact that the most responsive fight against new Covid-19 variant must be at the points of entry, there is need to ensure that each point of entry has at least 5 genexpert machines. Entebbe Airport as the main port of entry should at least have 15 machines. This would boost the levels of effectiveness required to ensure zero entry of the Omicron variant into the country. With this testing capacity, we can demand that NO body leaves airport premises before negative test results are out.

e) Presumption of work by medical personnel

In lieu of the doctor's strike and emergence of the omicron variant, there is urgent need to have the medical workers withdraw from the sit down strike and resume work. This ought not to negate their demands and concerns. Hence it is critical in the interim that their demands are partly met especially immediate payments of allowances to the Senior House Officers and medical

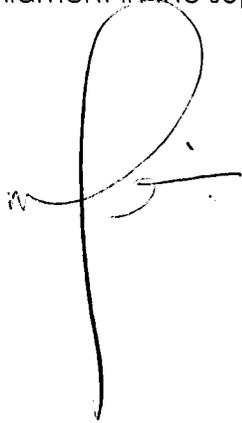
² Dr. Aceng Jane Ruth Oceru, 2021. Statement to Parliament on the inconvenience to Inbound Travellers at Entebbe International Airport during the Implementation of the COVID-19 Mandatory Testing

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interns both from public and private universities. The funds have already been approved by parliament in the supplementary schedule 1 for FY 2021/22.

I beg to submit

I beg to Submit

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop at the top, followed by a vertical line that curves to the right at the bottom.