Morocco suspends all incoming flights over Omicron

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Rabat, November 29 (RHC)-- Morocco has said it will halt incoming passenger flights for two weeks as concern grows over a new, heavily mutated variant of the coronavirus dubbed Omicron.

A government committee tasked with overseeing the country's COVID-19 response said in a statement on Sunday the measure would take effect from 11:59 pm (22:59 GMT) on Monday and would be evaluated regularly to make "adjustments if necessary."

"The decision has been taken because of the quick spread of the new COVID variant, Omicron, namely in Europe and Africa, and in order … to protect the health of Moroccan citizens," it said. The announcement came hours after Israel said it would be closing its borders to foreign tourists from Sunday evening over Omicron.

The variant was first detected in South Africa, with cases reported in several countries, prompting nations to reimpose travel curbs that many had hoped were a thing of the past.

Morocco, whose economy relies heavily on tourism, had announced on Friday a ban on entry to travellers from South Africa and six other African nations. It had already decided to suspend flights to and from France amid a spike in coronavirus infections in Europe.

France has the world's largest Moroccan expatriate community, with more than one million Moroccans living in the European Union member state. In October, Morocco said it was suspending flights to and from Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Russia due to concerns about coronavirus trends in those countries.

Morocco has officially recorded about 950,000 coronavirus cases and more than 14,700 deaths.

Earlier this month, the North African kingdom lifted a nighttime curfew imposed months earlier to curb the spread of COVID-19.

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