

Acsa slams chaplain's claim on a rise in drug trafficking cases via OR Tambo airport

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Picture: African News Agency (ANA)

Cape Town – The Airports Company of SA (Acsa) has slammed chaplain John Wotherspoon's suggestion that there has been a rise in drug trafficking cases via OR Tambo International Airport.

Acsa spokesperson Betty Maloka said yesterday that the claim caused reputational damage for the airport and South Africa.

"The relevant agencies responsible for detecting and preventing drug trafficking and trade in illicit goods as set out in legislation and regulations are aware of the report, and are attending to the matter.

"Our mandate and responsibility is to safeguard civil aviation against unlawful interference," Maloka said.

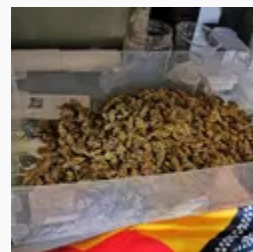
In a statement this week, Wotherspoon claimed that 20% of all people arrested at Hong Kong International Airport in 2018 and 2019 for the possession of illegal substances had brought drugs from Johannesburg.

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In the same statement, Patricia Gerber of the NPO South Africans Locked Up in Foreign Countries alleged 100 people were arrested at the Mauritius airport since 2017 and incarcerated or remanded in custody, and had brought drugs via OR Tambo International Airport.

Maloka said no prohibited items are allowed on board an aircraft that could be used to perpetrate an act of unlawful interference to civil aviation such as hijacking, acts of terrorism, explosions and other threats.

“The mandate to prevent drug trafficking and all other aspects of criminality resides with the SAPS. The prevention of trade in illicit goods is the responsibility of the Customs and Excise division of SARS.

“Airport management remains committed to continue working and collaborating with the various law enforcement agencies based at the airport to ensure an integrated tactical approach is employed to eradicate all forms of criminality in and around the airport precinct,” Maloka said.

Earlier this month, security and stop-and-search operations at OR Tambo International Airport saw three people arrested in a week for being in possession of illicit tools, bringing the total number of arrests for the holiday season to 33.

Airport spokesperson Samukelo Khambule said 907 people and 101 vehicles on the airside were stopped and searched.

“The peak season safety and security operation was boosted with the addition of 14 SAPS constables over and above the 75 SAPS members provided at the start of the holidays,” Khambule said.

She added that 11 cases of trespassing at the terminal section were reported, in a drive to identify and remove loiterers from the buildings.

“Searches on the airside of possible places of concealment led to the separate discoveries of five tools that could be used to open bags.

“The tools seized include a box cutter, a screwdriver and three items fashioned from pieces of metal,” she said.

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