



Department
for International
Development



Mr F Goldberg
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23 April 2018

Dear Mr Goldberg,

Freedom of Information Request F2017-443

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request dated 22 November 2017 in which you asked for the following information.

*“Details and documentation of all meetings and minutes about Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories held between Department for International Development (DFID) officials (Ministers and civil servants) and representatives of the **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)**, between August 2014 to present.*

Specifically, I am requesting:

- 1) The number of meetings held and the dates of these; and*
- 2) Minutes of these meetings*
- 3) Correspondences between DFID officials and members of the Norwegian Refugee Council”*

As previously explained, our searches of our electronic filing systems returned a large volume of data, particularly in relation to Norwegian Refugee Council over the time period requested. Following on from our email exchanges, thank you for therefore narrowing your request on 14 January 2018 to request the following information:

“Details and documentation of all meetings and minutes about Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories held between Department for International Development (DFID) officials (Ministers and civil servants and representatives of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), for the six months from August 2016”.

The Department for International Development holds information relating to a meeting relevant to your request which took place on 25 August 2016. We are, however withholding further information relating to the meeting under the exemptions at Section 27 (1) (a) (c) and (d) (International relations), section 38 (1) (a) and (b) (Health and safety), section 40 (2) (Personal information) and section 43 (2) (Commercial interests) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I have set out our analysis of the public interest factors relating to the qualified exemptions overleaf.

Section 27 (1) (a) (c) and (d) (International relations)

Section 27 (1) (a) (c) and (d) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the relations between the United Kingdom and any other state, or the interests of the UK abroad, or the promotion or protection by the United Kingdom of its interests abroad.

In applying this exemption we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the general public interest in transparency and accountability. There is also a clear public interest in raising awareness and understanding of how the UK government works at a country level and in how we aim to engage with partner governments in seeking to reduce poverty.

Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in ensuring that DFID and the UK Government are able to promote international development and protect UK interests abroad. To do this there must be good working relationships with other governments based on confidence and trust. Disclosing sensitive information relating to them would be likely to damage these relationships, harm the ability of DFID to work with and influence other donors in eradicating poverty and undermine the UK's ability to respond to international development needs. Disclosure could also significantly damage the UK's ability to deliver HM Government policy and to protect and promote UK interests overseas.

We have concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information.

Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) (Health and Safety)

We are withholding some information under Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) which provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or endanger the safety of any individual.

Factors in favour of disclosure include that it contributes to a better understanding of how DFID and the UK government works in difficult environments.

Factors against disclosure include the very real danger to individuals if we disclosed the information requested. Because of the difficult security situation in some overseas countries, we feel that the security of many individuals could be seriously compromised. Their safety is of paramount importance and we have, therefore, concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information.

Section 40 (2) (Personal information)

We are withholding some information under section 40(2) of the Act, which relates to personal information. We believe that disclosure would breach the legitimate expectation of the individuals' rights to protection of their personal information. This would not be fair to the individuals concerned and disclosure would therefore be in breach of the first principle of the Data Protection Act 1998. Section 40(2) is an absolute exemption and there is, therefore, no requirement to balance the public interest.

Section 43 (2) (Commercial interests)

Section 43 (2) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person including the public authority holding it.

In applying this exemption, we have had to determine whether the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosing this information include the general public interest in transparency in the use of public funds and in ensuring that commercial activities are conducted in an open and honest way. Disclosure could also help to improve public awareness and understanding of the workings of government and the government's dealings with commercial organisations.

Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in protecting the legitimate commercial interests of those who share information with DFID. Disclosure of sensitive information would make it less likely that companies or individuals would provide DFID with commercially sensitive information in the future, as our disclosure of this information would be likely to damage their reputation and thus their ability to compete in the market place. Disclosure could also damage DFID's reputation in the international community and could consequently undermine the department's ability to fulfil its role and to achieve value for money in the use of public funds.

We have concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information.

Please contact me, quoting reference number F2017-443, if you have any questions about this letter. Please accept my apologies for the delay there has been in issuing your FOI response and working through the information initially thought to be in scope of the request.

If you are unhappy with the service we have provided and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you should write to the Information Rights Team at the address shown in the footnote below or email foi@dfid.gov.uk within two months of the date of this letter.

If you do make a complaint and are not content with the outcome, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted DFID's complaints procedure. You can contact the Information Commissioner at the following address: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

Alison Marshall
Information Rights Team
Department for International Development