



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Somalia Unit  
Africa Directorate  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0328-17**

Thank you for your email of 3 April 2017 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*Does the Government of the United Kingdom recognise the Republic of Somaliland?*

*If not, under what circumstance would the Government of the United Kingdom plan to recognise the Republic of Somaliland?*

*What diplomatic relations are currently undertaken between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Somaliland?*

*What treaties or other legal instruments such as memoranda of understanding have been entered into with the Republic of Somaliland?*

You also requested *any ministerial correspondence or policy briefing from 01 Jan 2015 to today.*

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

Please find responses to your questions. Some of the information is exempt under section 24 (1) on National Security, and section 27 (International relations) of the FOIA.

*Does the Government of the United Kingdom recognise the Republic of Somaliland? If not, under what circumstance would the Government of the United Kingdom plan to recognise the Republic of Somaliland?*

Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but is not recognised by the UK or others in the international community. HMG's position has long been that it is for Somalia and Somaliland to decide their future, and for regional neighbours to take the lead in recognising any new arrangements.

We remain supportive of ongoing dialogue between Somalia and Somaliland, and hope that the Somaliland presidential elections now due in November 2017 will provide the opportunity to reinvigorate and accelerate this.

*What diplomatic relations are currently undertaken between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Somaliland?*

We retain close links with the Somaliland Government. Somaliland Ministers regularly meet with UK representatives in the region, and also in London, to discuss a wide variety of issues. British diplomats based in the region visit Hargeisa regularly.

The UK office in Hargeisa continues to enable officials to stay in Hargeisa for short periods to carry out diplomatic and programmatic work in Somaliland. The office has no consular functions. We have locally engaged staff, who support programming, political and corporate work.

*What treaties or other legal instruments such as memoranda of understanding have been entered into with the Republic of Somaliland?*

The UK has not entered into any treaties with the “The Republic of Somaliland” or the Somaliland Government. An MoU is not a legal instrument. We signed a memorandum of understanding on immigration returns with the Somaliland Government in 2007. We signed a project-level memorandum of understanding on aviation security with the Somaliland Government in 2013. The project completed in 2015 and the MoU no longer applies. We signed an MoU on UK support to increase the transparency of government communications with the Somaliland Government in 2016. We signed an MoU on UK capacity building support to the Somaliland Security & Justice sector with the Somaliland Government on November 2015. DFID signed an MoU jointly with the Danish Government and the Somaliland Government for support to the Somaliland Development Fund (SDF) in 2013 which aims to build infrastructure, and improve service delivery in Somaliland. This was recently extended until 2018. The Ministry of Justice signed a Prisoner Transfer Agreement with Somaliland in 2014. DFID signed an MoU with the Somaliland Government on support to the Energy Security and Resource Efficiency in Somaliland (ESRES) Programme in 2015 which aims to strengthen energy security and access in Somaliland through diversifying Somaliland’s energy sources.

The release of information relating to security co-operation agreements and bilateral co-operation with the Somaliland authorities is exempt under Section 24 (1) (National Security) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 24 is a qualified exemption, which means that it is subject to a public interest test. We again acknowledge the public interest in openness and transparency, but we consider that there is also a public interest in the FCO protecting national security through our relationships with the Somaliland authorities, and our bilateral security cooperation. We are concerned that the release of information pertaining to security agreements would undermine the relationships we have developed, and on which our security cooperation aimed at countering threats to the security of the UK and UK interests relies. This would also reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations and cooperation with Somaliland in furtherance of national and regional security, which would not be in the public interest. We have therefore concluded that these exemptions apply and that withholding the material serves the public interest better than release in this instance.

The FCO can neither confirm nor deny whether the above information represents all the information held that would meet the terms of your request, as the duty to comply with section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of sections 23(5). Section 23 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. We do not therefore have to apply the public interest test.

*Ministerial correspondence or policy briefing from 01 Jan 2015 to today.*

We have interpreted your request for ministerial correspondence to mean correspondence between UK ministers and Somaliland ministers, and we have interpreted your request for ministerial policy briefing to mean briefing provided by UK officials to UK ministers. Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states if it was disclosed. Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but is not recognised by the UK or others in the international community. In this case, the release of information relating to private correspondence could harm our relations with Somalia.

The application of s.27(1)(a) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about Somaliland and our relations and interaction with it or states in the region. However, s.27 (1) (a) recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the United Kingdom does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information detailing our relationship with Somaliland or states in the region would prejudice and potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Somaliland and those states. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests, which would not be in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

A digest of information from ministerial policy briefing that is within the scope of your request is attached. Some of the information has been redacted in accordance with s.27(1)(a) of the FOIA.

Yours sincerely,

Somalia Unit  
Africa Directorate

