



Foreign &
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Office

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11 October 2017

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0749-17

Thank you for your email of 4 August 2017 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

information regarding the way money allocated to Syria Civil Defence (SCD), also known as the White Helmets, is spent.

In answer to previous FOI requests related to the UK's support of the White Helmets, the FCO has written:

"the total value of funds committed between June 2013 and the end of the current financial year (31 March 2016) is £19.7m. All funds are accounted for in line with HMG guidelines, including the receipt and review of quarterly financial reports"

Would it be possible to view at least one of the abovementioned quarterly financial reports, in order to better understand what the SCD, or White Helmets as they're known, are specifically spending the funds allocated to them by the UK on?

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request.

By way of background, UK support to the Syria Civil Defence (White Helmets) is provided through our implementing partner Mayday Rescue, which is a registered foundation in The Netherlands. Under applicable law it is required to maintain financial and administration records. And as a recipient of Conflict Stability and Security Fund money, Mayday Rescue is required to submit regular accounting for its support to Syria Civil Defence.

However, in relation to your request for a copy of a Quarterly Report that information details, falls under the exemption in section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, which relates to commercial interests. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

There is a public interest in the disclosure of commercial information to ensure effective, open and honest use of public money and the scrutiny of public authorities in accordance with published policy and to provide an environment where business can better respond to government opportunities.

Furthermore, we consider that this transparency also poses risks in that companies and individuals would, if this information were disclosed, be much less likely to provide the FCO with commercially sensitive information. This would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO. In doing so, it would seriously impair our ability to work for UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world.

However, for your background, the support we provide have helped SCD increase the resilience of the civilian population in Syria, by providing emergency search and rescue and medical support to communities. We will continue to provide training and equipment for SCD, as well as support for them to build their overall capability and further strengthen their relationships with governance actors and other service providers. In addition to service delivery, SCD provide an invaluable reporting and advocacy role, being nominated again this year for the Nobel Peace Prize. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have stated that SCD are their most routinely reliable source for reporting. The UK approach is relatively unique in that we are directly supporting and empowering Syrian institutions and individuals – rather than providing basic goods, cash for work schemes or other short-term, humanitarian approaches.

This means our interventions have a (local) political impact beyond just basic service delivery. In addition, we have been able to establish strong coordination mechanisms. We plan to build on and expand this coordination next year, developing comprehensive strategies for our approach to governance, livelihoods, education and SCD within Syria and encourage all donors, and the UK humanitarian effort to work within these frameworks.

Yours sincerely,

Near East Department



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