



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

**Diplomatic Missions and
International Organisations Unit
Protocol Directorate**

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King Charles Street
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25 October 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0926-16

Thank you for your email of 5 October asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I would like to inquire about special mission immunity visas granted to foreign nationals.

Please could you provide details on Special Mission Immunity Visas have been granted between 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2015, broken down by date and country of origin.

We are writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information you requested.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is not responsible for visa matters. For information about visa endorsements you may wish to consult published guidance on GOV.UK [here](#), or contact UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) of the Home Office.

We can confirm, however, that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request.

Irrespective of the type of visa that may have been issued by UKVI, when a visit to the UK meets the definition of a special mission (a temporary mission, representing a State, which is sent by one State to another with the consent of the latter, in order to carry out official engagements on behalf of the sending State) the FCO may consent to the visit as having special mission status (SMS). Ultimately, however, the legal question of whether any member of a special mission is entitled to immunity is always a matter for the Courts.

For the period between 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2015 the FCO consented to 15 requests for SMS, covering 47 visitors in total.

In view of the confidentiality of diplomatic exchanges, we do not publish further details about SMS requests that have been granted or refused. Therefore, additional information related to your request has been withheld under section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA. Section 27(1)(a) recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states if it was disclosed. But if those applying for SMS wish to announce the details of their visit to the UK, they are of course at liberty to do so.

The application of section 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 individual special missions would increase public knowledge about our relations

with the states in question. But section 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 about waivers of immunity and the consequences of a decision, or failure, to grant a waiver of immunity could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and other states. This would reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with other states, 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.

Yours sincerely,

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We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.