



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

South East Asia Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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15 July 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0368-16

Thank you for your email of 1 April 2016 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

I would like to request the following information regarding a meeting of the situation of the Rohingya and Rakhine, held by the Foreign Office on 23rd March 2016.

I would like copies of all emails, letters, memo's or any other correspondence, or records of any kind, both formal and in staff notebooks, relating to the organisation of this meeting. In particular I would like any information relevant to decisions of who would, or would not, be invited to the meeting, who was invited, and who did attend on the day.

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 attached the information that the FCO can release to you.

While the vast bulk of the information which falls within your request is being released, there is a small amount of information which is exempt from release under sections of the FOIA.

Some of the information within the scope of your request is exempt 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. In this case, the release of information relating to the Rakhine conference could harm our relations with Burma and strategic supporters over the issue of Rakhine. 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 our relations with Burma. 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 the Burmese Government could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Burma. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with Burma, 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.

Some additional information has been withheld under **section 35(1)(a)** as it relates to the formulation of government policy. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test. In applying the public interest test I recognised that there is public interest in transparency in the formulation and implementation of Government policy. However, I also recognise that Ministers and officials need to be protected from such transparency to be able to discuss and debate policy free from the pressures of public political debate. There is a strong public interest in ensuring high-quality policy-making and implementation. For Government to succeed in upholding the public interest, Ministers and officials need to be able to consider, debate and understand implications of the policy and how it is presented. Their candour in doing so will be affected by their assessment of whether the content of such discussions will be disclosed in the near future. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Once an FOI request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, we may now publish the response and any material released on gov.uk in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

South East Asia Department

