



Home Office

Direct Communications Unit

2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

Switchboard 020 7035 4848 Fax: 020 7035 4745 Textphone: 020 7035 4742

E-mail: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk Website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk

10 March 2006

Thank you for your letter of 3 February 2006 requesting Home Office documents relating to the reasons for disbanding the Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit in 1999. Your request has been handled in accordance with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

After having carefully considered your request and examined records for the period you suggested between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 1999, the information you requested is enclosed.

I should explain that the decision to disband the Unit was an operational decision for the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and that responsibility for this area of work was passed to another unit within the Metropolitan Police. Similarly the conclusions reached by the Unit were operational matters for the Commissioner and, where files were submitted for consideration of prosecution, the Crown Prosecution Service. Home Office Ministers have no role in these matters.

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting your complaint to:

Information Policy Team
Information and Record Management Service
Home Office
4th Floor, Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

During the independent review the department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. Should you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you will have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

I hope that you find this information of interest, and would like to assure you that you have been supplied with all relevant information that the Home Office holds.

Yours sincerely,

Lines to take

- Anthony Sawoniuk was recently prosecuted and convicted under the War Crimes Act. He has been sentenced to life imprisonment and there is an appeal pending.
- In April 1996 Szymon Serafinowicz was committed for trial from to the Central Criminal Court on allegations of the murder of Jewish civilians in Belarus. In January 1997 a jury at the Central Criminal Court found the defendant unfit to stand trial. Subsequently the Attorney General entered a Nolle Prosequi due to the defendant's failing mental health. Mr Serafinowicz has since died.
- There have been numerous other cases investigated, but these have been the only two prosecutions. There is one outstanding case with the Crown Prosecution Service.
- The War Crimes Unit in the Metropolitan Police Service recently closed, as there were no more leads for the police to investigate. If new evidence were to come up this would be investigated by the police, but not through a specific War Crimes Unit.

Background

The War Crimes Act gives the courts jurisdiction over murder, manslaughter and culpable homicide committed as violations of the laws and customs of the war during the Second World War in Germany or German-held territory by people who are now British citizens or resident in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, irrespective of their nationality at the material time.

POLICING OF LONDON DEBATE 1999: BRIEFING

C: RESOURCES AND MANPOWER

War Crimes, disbanding of unit

Lines to take

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