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14 August 2014

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0677-14

Thank you for your email of 11 July asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

I would like to obtain the first draft of the final version of the "Six monthly reports on Hong Kong: January to June 2014" which was released on July 10.

I would also like to confirm when the first draft of this report was written.

And I would like to know when the final draft of this report was written.

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

The FCO does not hold a log of when each draft of this report was written. Nevertheless, in the interests of transparency, I can confirm that we gather information for the Six-Monthly Reports throughout the reporting period, and usually start drafting between three and four weeks before the end of the period.

However, your request to obtain the first draft of the Six Monthly Report is being withheld under section 35(1)(a) of the FOIA, as it relates to the formulation of government policy. In applying the required 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. In this case I have determined that the balance of public interest lies in withholding this information.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

Hong Kong Desk Officer
China Department



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