



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

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5 August 2016

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0568 - 16**

Thank you for your email of 3 June asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

I respectfully request that consideration be given to the following FOI request for the purposes of academic research:

- *Release of all documentation received by, and dispatched from FCO between 1 May 2005 – 31 July 2005, which allude to Operation Murambatsvina or Operation Restore Order, and/or discusses Zimbabwean government's forcible clearance of people from their place of residence or work.*
- *I respectfully request that this request would necessarily include all documentation detailing communications between the FCO and the British High Commission between 1 May 2005 – 31 July 2005 that allude to Operation Murambatsvina or Operation Restore Order, and/or discusses Zimbabwean government's forcible clearance of people from their place of residence or work.*
- *I respectfully request that this request would include all documentation detailing communications between the British FCO and their counterparts in the governments of the United States, Australia, and Canada.*

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 the FCO can release to you.

There are 6 emails with attachments, 42 documents in total. Please let us know if you do not receive all of them.

Concerning information withheld, under section 21 of the Act, we are not required to provide information in response to a request if it is already reasonably accessible to you, such as Press releases.

Some of the information has been withheld using Section 27 – international relations. Section 27 is a qualified exemption and is subject to a public interest test. 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 Zimbabwe. 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 Government of Zimbabwe could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Zimbabwe. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with Zimbabwe, 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.

The effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between Governments. This relationship of trust allows for the free and frank exchange of information on the understanding that it will be treated in confidence. If the UK does not respect such confidences, its ability to protect and promote UK interest through international relations will be prejudiced. International bodies may be more reluctant to share sensitive information with the UK Government in future and may be less likely to respect the confidentiality of information supplied by the UK Government, to the detriment of UK interests. For all these reasons, we consider that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information covered by section 27 (1)(b).

Some 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. There is public interest in protecting policy-making processes and ensuring this process remains able to deliver effective government. This is considered against the public interest in making publicly available information about policy-making processes. We consider that the balance of the public interest lies in favour of withholding certain information in relation to your request because it relates to ministerial correspondence and the operation of private offices, which are necessary to develop and deliver government policy.

Some information has been withheld under Section 41(1)(b), as it is information that was provided in confidence. It is our view that disclosure of this information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence and so disclosure would also be unlawful under the Act. In

these circumstances, Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act confers an absolute exemption on disclosure and there is no public interest test to apply.

Yours sincerely,

Zimbabwe Unit

Africa Directorate, Central and Southern



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