



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Africa Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

2 December 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0945-16

Thank you for your email of 10 October asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

- 1. According to transparency data published in October 2014, a meeting took place between the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Mark Simmonds and Africa Matters Ltd, at some point in January 2014.*
- 2. The agenda for this meeting however was only given as "To discuss Africa," which is rather broad.*
- 3. Please could you give significantly more detail as to what this meeting entailed?*
- 4. Please could you also confirm the exact date and list of attendees?*
- 5. Please could you provide details of any and all payments made by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to Africa Matters Ltd in the last three years?*
- 6. Please could you also confirm if any agreement exists between Africa Matters Ltd, or Baroness Chalker, and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, to share information of a counter-intelligence nature that Africa Matters may come across in the course of their work with foreign governments?*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold documents relevant to points one to four of your request. In response to point five, I can confirm a payment by the FCO of £1212.37 was made to Africa Matters Limited for travel expenses for Baroness Chalker to attend a conference in Mauritius in October 2013. In regard to point six the FCO does not hold documents relevant to your request.

Please find attached a meeting record between Africa Matters and Mark Simmonds, which took place on 9 January 2014.

Some information has been redacted from the released documents under section 27 (1) (a), section 40 and section 43 of the Act.

Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA 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 could harm our relations with some countries in sub-Saharan Africa as listed in the attached document.

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 various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. 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 various Governments in sub-Saharan Africa could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and those countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 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 of the information you have requested is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances sections 40(2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, s.40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Some information has been redacted from the released documents under section 43(2) of the Act as its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test.

The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the general need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the limited amount of information which has been redacted, information outweighs the public interest in its release.

Yours sincerely,

Africa Directorate



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.