



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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

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

7 February 2017

Your Freedom of Information (FOI) Request: 0979-16

Thank you for your request for information which we received on 18 October 2016. In your request you asked for:

“minutes from all meetings (between May 2014 and August 2014) that Mark Simmonds, the Africa minister at the time, held with Nigerian governmental officials, where the ‘Chibok Girls’, kidnapped by Boko Haram, were discussed.

Minutes from all meetings (between May 2014 and October 2014) that any FCO representative, held with Nigerian governmental officials, where the ‘Chibok Girls’, kidnapped by Boko Haram, were discussed.”

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request.

As you requested we have considered this request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). We have reviewed all information with a presumption in favour of disclosure.

We have interpreted your request in its widest form to mean those aspects of any such minutes that discussed the Chibok Girls.

We are withholding some of the information in the attached documents because it falls under relevant exemptions under the applicable regime. We have set out the exemptions applied below.

FOIA Section 27(1)(a)(c) and (d) - International Relations

Section 27(1)(a)(c) and (d) of the FOIA provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the relations between the UK and any other state, the interests of the UK abroad, or the promotion or protection by the UK of its interests abroad.

The FCO considers that there is a general public interest in greater transparency in how Government operates and in demonstrating the methods of communication, it conducts with other states. Open policy making may also lead to increased trust and engagement between citizens and government. Factors in favour of disclosure include the strong public interest in

government transparency and accountability. Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in ensuring that the FCO is able to conduct the UK's international relations effectively and protect UK interests abroad. To do this there must be good working relationships with other governments based on confidence and trust. 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 maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to act as a significant player in the international arena, and protect and promote UK interests through international relations, will be hampered.

With regard to information, the disclosure of which would or would be likely to prejudice the UK's relations with Nigeria or its interests abroad, we have had to balance the important public interest in disclosure of information against the public interest in protecting the UK's international relationships. The FCO believes that publication of certain details would undermine the working relationships between the UK government and the Government of Nigeria. Disclosure of information which was shared in confidence, and is not already in the public domain, would reduce the willingness of the other governments to engage with the UK and would weaken the ability of the FCO to operate in the UK's national interest. The FCO considers that in this instance this factor outweighs the public interest in releasing the information.

The FCO can neither confirm nor deny that it holds further information relevant to your request, as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, does not apply by virtue of Sections 23(5) and 24(2) of the Act. To the extent that Section 24(2) of the Act applies, we have determined that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exclusion of the duty to confirm or deny outweighs the public interest in confirming whether the FCO holds further information, and that to give a statement of the reasons for this would involve the disclosure of information which would itself be exempt information. Therefore, under Section 17(4) of the Act, the FCO is not obliged to give such a statement. However, this should not be taken as evidence that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

Yours sincerely,

West Africa Department



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.