

Downes Peter HQ-SCC

From: O'Brien Julie HQ-POLITICAL
Sent: Thursday 12 December 2019 16:57
To: O CONGHAILE Sean
Subject: Your request for information under the FOI Act 2014 to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - decision

Ref: FOI Req 19285

Dear Mr Ó Conghaile

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, amended on 15 November as follows:

All internal emails and briefings of the DFAT related to Ireland's campaign at UNGA this year to garner support for Ireland's election to the Security Council for the 2021 - 2022 (SECCO) within the time period of 25th August 2019 to the 25th September 2019.

I also refer to our exchange of emails and our telephone conversation of 15 October 2019 where we discussed Ireland's campaign for election to the UN Security Council. As I mentioned to you, Security Council membership is an over-arching goal of the Department of Foreign Affairs and a priority of the Government. The campaign for election to the Council is central to the current work of UN Policy, our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York as well as many other areas of the Department both at Headquarters and abroad. As such, it is implicitly linked to many records created during the timeframe specified in your request.

As agreed, on 12 November 2019 I forwarded to you a synopsis of the programmes of the Taoiseach and Ministers during their visit to the UN in New York in September 2019, to help identify elements that might narrow the focus of your FOI request.

On 15 November 2019, you confirmed that you wished to proceed with your amended request for records (as above, in bold).

Having sought to assist you in focusing the scope of your request, I have now examined your request in full.

The records that fall within the scope of your request include all records related to the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2019 which was attended by President Michael D Higgins, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D., Tánaiste Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Katherine Zappone T.D., Minister for Health Simon Harris T.D., Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Richard Bruton T.D., Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development Ciarán Cannon T.D., and Minister of State for European Affairs Helen McEntee T.D. Relevant records were also created in the preparation for the five UN Summits that took place at UNGA which were attended by the Taoiseach and the Ministers listed above.

The search, retrieval and examination of records that may come within the scope of your request would fall to officials in UN Policy, the Permanent Mission to the UN in New York as well as other Embassies and Offices abroad, the Office of the Tánaiste, the Office of the Minister of State for Diaspora and International Development, the Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs, Policy and Communications Division, European Union Division, Development Cooperation and Africa Division, Asia Pacific Unit, Middle East and North Africa Unit, Political Division, Legal Division, Protocol Division and Finance Division.

An examination of a typical mailbox in UN Policy shows between 25 and 55 records per day were created during the preparation for UNGA, and that over the course of the timeframe of your request, more than 100 officials would have created or received records that would now fall to be retrieved and examined.

Decision

Having reflected on the broad scope of your request, the volume of records to be retrieved and the widespread engagement by the Department that would be required to comply with your request, I have made a decision to refuse it under Section 15(1)(c) of the FOI Act:

*15(1) A head to whom an FOI request is made may refuse to grant the request where –
(c) in the opinion of the head, granting the request would, by reason of the number or nature of the records concerned or the nature of the information concerned, require the retrieval and examination of such number of records or an examination of such kind of the records concerned as to cause a substantial and unreasonable interference with or disruption of work (including disruption of work in a particular functional area) of the FOI body concerned.*

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely

Julie O'Brien

