

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Baile Átha Cliath 2

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Dublin 2

13th December 2016

Mr Colin Coyle
The Sunday Times
4th Floor
Bishops Square
Redmond Hill
Dublin 2

Re: FOI/Req/16/160

Dear Mr Coyle

I refer to your two FOI requests submitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 received on the 13th and 18th October 2016 respectively, seeking records relating to the following:

- *I wish to request, under the Freedom of Information Act, all correspondence with Goal and/or US Aid since June 2016.*
- *Please also include internal departmental/Irish Aid correspondence in relation to the suspension of the funding and/or Goal's procurement practices.*
- *A copy of a 2016 report drawn up by BDO for Goal on its Syrian operations which has been submitted to Irish Aid.*

I also refer to the acknowledgement of your request on the 17th October 2016 and subsequent correspondence on the 14th and 28th November 2016. As previously advised, I am responding to both FOI requests in this combined response. This letter has three parts as follows:

- Recent Developments in respect of Goal outside the time period covered by the FOI
- FOI Decision
- Consideration of the Public Interest

Recent Developments

Before setting out my decision in relation to your FOI Requests, I wish to advise you of recent developments. The US Office of the Inspector General (OIG) as you are aware, has launched an investigation into an international case related to a number of NGOs including GOAL and that investigation is ongoing. Since May, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade withheld a total of €10.1m in Humanitarian and Development funding which has been planned for GOAL. This funding was withheld pending further clarity on the issues raised in the US Investigation and on Goal's plan to address them.

The Department has directly engaged with the Board and the new General Manager of GOAL as well as the US and other international donors in relation to the investigation. This ongoing engagement has included a detailed review of the financial information and assurances provided by GOAL in relation to its programmes. Resulting from this, the release of €3.92m in withheld funding for 2016 in respect of development programmes delivered on the ground in Africa in recent months in line with the original agreement with Irish Aid has been agreed. A copy of the press release related to this is attached.

Decision

As responding officer, I have identified 129 records related to your request which cover the period 1st June to the 1st November. These records are set out in the attached schedule to this letter and are listed chronologically in date order. I have decided to release access to 7 records, part grant access to 10 records and refuse access to 112 records as listed in the attached schedule.

The Department has a responsibility to ensure that we do not jeopardise the ongoing investigation or the work of our partner while ensuring that public funds are safeguarded to the most rigorous standard. As part of Irish Aid's ongoing engagement, (referred to above under recent developments) information and assurances documents have been provided to officials in the Department from various sources.

The majority of the records which are either being refused, or part granted and released in redacted format, in my view data relate to the deliberative process of the Department Section 29 in this ongoing matter. Personal data in line with Section 37(1) of the FOI Act is also redacted.

Consideration of the Public Interest

As required by the 2014 Freedom of Information Act, I am also required to consider specific considerations in relation to the public interest and where access has been part granted or refused under specific Sections of the Act as outlined below.

Section 29 2014 FOI Act

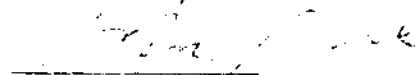
Under Section 29 of the Act, Deliberations of FOI Bodies, 113 records have either been part-granted or refused. In arriving at this decision, I have considered whether the public interest would be better served by releasing the records in question in terms of the right of the public to have access to information, the need for transparency in decision-making processes and the need for an open and accountable Civil Service. Given the source and nature of the records, I am satisfied that premature release of certain records would negatively impact on the decision-making processes of this Department, disclose positions taken by the Department and would substantially impair the good relations we have with an International organisations. On balance, the public interest would not be best served by releasing these records.

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 non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment please contact FOI@DFA.IE or telephone 01 4082857.

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

Yours sincerely



John Crowe

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade