



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: FOI/Req/19/064

25 February 2019

Dear Requester

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for the following information:

1. All records and communications from 1 December 2018 to 28 January 2019 between and involving Ministers, their officials and advisers, Government departments and civil servants (whether by email, WhatsApp message, mobile phone text, letter, correspondence, aide memoire, etc) about putative and actual trips to mark the Government's St Patrick's Day outreach 2019, concerning only destinations rather than precise or planned itineraries, but including any costings for travel and accommodation.
2. All particulars, including records and communications involving Ministers, their officials and advisers, Government departments and civil servants (whether by email, WhatsApp message, mobile phone text, letter, correspondence, aide memoire, etc) relating to the St Patrick's trip to Cuba in 2019.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 12 February.

St. Patrick's Day offers a unique opportunity to promote Ireland around the world, to celebrate our heritage and renew our bonds with the global Irish family. St Patrick's Day celebrations across the globe attract levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country.

In 2018 over 1300 events were hosted or supported by the Embassy network as part of the celebrations. Members of the Government and accompanying officials participated in 131 high-level political meetings and trade, tourism and investment in Ireland were promoted at 197 dedicated business events, attended by over 8,400 Irish and international company representatives. Feedback from the Embassy network, from state agencies and from other Government departments has been overwhelmingly positive on the impact of last year's programme of visits which it is hoped will deliver long-term benefits in terms of strengthening alliances at a political level and building business links.

Ministerial visits during the St. Patrick's Day period are organised to ensure that we make positive use of this exposure by strengthening links with our diaspora, spreading a positive message about Ireland and maximising the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and

investment interests in important overseas markets. Visits are undertaken in the most cost efficient way possible and each Minister and Department is responsible for their own costs.

The 2019 programme reflects Ireland's expanding diplomatic and state agency presence around the world, as part of the Global Ireland initiative. 56 countries will be visited in 2019, compared to 38 in 2018. Ministers will visit Wellington, Vancouver, Bogota and Santiago, where Ireland recently opened new diplomatic missions. Mumbai and Los Angeles will also receive a Ministerial visit over St Patrick's Day in advance of the opening of new Irish Consulates there later this year.

Please note that costings for travel for St Patrick's Day will not be available until after the visits have taken place.

I have identified 24 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant access to 15 of the records, part-grant access to 2 records and refuse access to 7 of the records.

As noted in the schedule I have made the decision not to grant access to four records as per Section 28 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014: A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if the record concerned has been, or is proposed to be, submitted to the Government for its consideration by a Minister of the Government or the Attorney General and was created for that purpose.

I have also made the decision not to grant access to three records as per Section 33 (1) (d) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014: A head may refuse to grant an FOI request in relation to a record if, in the opinion of the head, access to it could reasonably be expected to affect adversely the international relations of the State.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade operates in a complex and diverse environment. A mutuality of confidence exists in the communication between this Department and our interlocutors. This is particularly the case in respect of diplomatic communications. I have considered the possibility and likelihood that the release of these records could result in negative consequences, and prejudice the ability of this Department to effectively discharge its functions. To do otherwise would risk compromising the State's capacity to engage with international partners through diplomatic channels.

Two records have been partially redacted under Section 37 (1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014: Subject to this section, a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if, in the opinion of the head, access to the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information (including personal information relating to a deceased individual).

While Section 37(1) Personal Information is a mandatory exemption, I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the record in full. I have taken into account the benefit to the public to be given access to correspondence in a manner which demonstrates transparency and accountability of the Department. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information, which includes names, addresses, email addresses etc., would provide any additional benefit in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private. The personal information which I have redacted does not have any bearing on the substance or detail of the record, and does not diminish or alter the views expressed, and as

such, I am satisfied that on balance the decision to partially redact the record and remove identifiable information is correct.

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


Shane Griffin