



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

Our Ref: Fol/Req/19/132

12th April 2019

Dear Mr. McQuinn,

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

- *Copies of correspondence in 2019 to/from the department of Foreign Affairs (including the embassy in Washington and consulate in Chicago) in relation to the Taoiseach's participation in the St Patrick's Day programme in Chicago, involving the following individuals / organisations: the Mayor of Chicago and his office; Senator Billy Lawless; The Irish Fellowship Club and its President Kevin Flood; the organisers of the St Patrick's Day parade in Chicago (the plumbers' union); and parade chairman, James Coyne. Also seeking copies of guest lists for the parade provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and copies of any invitations that came from Chicago based organisations for the Taoiseach for St Patrick's Day events in 2019 (whenever they were received).*

I have identified 21 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant full release of 8 records and partial release of 13 records.

Where access has been only partially granted or refused the cases relate to section 29 (1) (a) Deliberations of Public Bodies, section 33. (1) (a) Security, defence and international relations and section 37(1) Personal Information.

Section 29 – Deliberations of FOI bodies

In relation to Section 29(1)(a) of the Act, 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 and the need for accountability and transparency in the decision making processes of public bodies. However given the source and nature of these records I am satisfied that their release would negatively impact on the decision making and information sharing

process of this Department. In particular I believe the release of these records, and the insight they give on politically sensitive issues, would adversely affect the ability and process of this Department to continue its work on these issues and with the same interlocutors. As such, and on balance, I have decided the public interest would not best be served in releasing these records.

Section 33 – Security, defence and international relations

Section 33. (2) (b) (i) and (ii) Security, defence and international relations, is a mandatory exemption and in the occasions that I have used it relates to the security considerations for the Taoiseach during his time in the Chicago. As you can appreciate, the security and safety of the Taoiseach and those travelling with him are of paramount importance. As such, no records can be released which can give insight into security arrangements or which could impair future security arrangements. I have therefore redacted aspects of the records that relate to this but on the whole they do not affect the substance of the record.

Section 37 – Personal information

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 records 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. In the main, the information redacted relates to personal contact information and does not affect the substance of the record. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information would provide any additional benefit in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private and have found that there is a clear prerogative for this information to remain private.

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,
James Rowan

*Americas Unit
Ireland, UK and Americas Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*