



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Our Ref: Fol/Req/21/212

Date 5 October 2021

Dear Mr. Hayes,

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:

- *All records relating to the creation of the role 'Special Envoy of the Government of Ireland for the Sahel'*
- *Any correspondence with the EEAS in relation to the above role.*

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 13 September 2021.

I have identified 83 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 44, part-grant 29, and refuse 10 of the records.

The appointment of a Special Envoy for francophone Africa and the Sahel is one element of the process by which Ireland is deepening its engagement in West Africa and the Sahel, in line with commitments outlined in the *Global Ireland 2025 Strategy* and *Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025*. You will see that the first documents in relation to this process date from January 2020, and that the appointment of a Special Envoy covering francophone Africa and the Sahel emerged as a specific recommendation from a scoping visit to the region in March 2020. This recommendation was then progressed through an approvals process, with Ministerial approval for the appointment of Kenneth Thompson as Special Envoy for francophone Africa and the Sahel granted in November 2020. In particular, I would draw your attention to the overview of the rationale behind the role, and the Special Envoy's work to date, which is available in Records 76 and 81. While records 78-80 do not exclusively relate to the creation of the role they do provide an overview of the Special Envoy's work to date, and I have included for the sake of completeness and having considered the public interest.

Where access has been refused, the records are exempt from release under the following Sections.

Section 33 (Security, defence and international relations)

Section 33(1)(d) stipulates that a head may refuse to grant an FOI request in relation to a record if, in the opinion of the head, its release could reasonably be expected to adversely affect international relations. Records 1, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27, 35, 52, 53, 67, 69-74, 78-80, and 83 have been partly refused on the basis that these records contain sensitive information encompassing the Department of Foreign Affairs' internal analyses of named countries and proposals for possible future actions that would adversely affect Ireland's international relations if released at the present time. Records 36, 58, and 62 have been refused on this basis.

Section 35 (Information Given to an FOI Body in Confidence)

Section 35(1)(a) provides for the exemption of records where the record concerns information given to an FOI body, in confidence and on the understanding that it would be treated as confidential and, in the opinion of the head, its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the giving to the body of further similar information from the same person or other persons and it is of importance to the body that such further similar information as aforesaid should continue to be given to the body. Records 54, 56, 63, 66, 68 and 82 have been refused on this basis. Records 79 and 80 have been partly refused on this basis. While Records 54, 79 and 80 were prepared by the FOI body, they contain information from external sources which was given to the FOI body in confidence and on the understanding that it would be treated as confidential.

Section 37 (Personal Information)

While Section 37(1) provides for the mandatory exemption of records, I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. Under Section 37(1) 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. Record 31 includes personal information relating to the Special Envoy and does not include any additional information that would determine that the public interest would be best served in releasing the record. Records 37 and 42 have also been partially refused for this reason.

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, (€10 for medical card holders). A copy of the medical card should be provided to avail of the reduced fee. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082618.

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

Arianna Whelan