



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Africa Directorate

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

28 October 2014

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: REF 0550-14

Thank you for your email of 23 May 2014 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

'I request certain documents concerning the visit to Britain by South African President Thabo Mbeki, around 17-20 May 2000'

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information, which you requested. My apologies for the delay in replying.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

Please find attached the information that the FCO can release to you. Some of the information has been withheld under section 27(1)(a) (international relations) of the FOIA. Section 27 is a qualified exemption and is subject to a public interest test. Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the UK and other states if it was disclosed.

The application of section 27(1)(a) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with South Africa. But section 27(1)(a) recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information detailing our relationship with the South African Government could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and South Africa and the UK and Zimbabwe. This would reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with South Africa and Zimbabwe, which would not be in the public interest. In this case, the release of information relating to your request could harm

our relations with South Africa and with Zimbabwe. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Some of the information has also been withheld under section 40 of the FOIA as it is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances, sections 40 (2) and (3) of the FOIA apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is the fairness aspect of this principle which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

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Yours sincerely,

Desk Officer, Southern Africa Section
Africa Directorate



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