



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

Our Ref: Fol/Req/19/232

Date: 28 August 2019

Dear Mr. Clarke,

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:

'Under the FOI Act 2014, I am seeking the following documents relating to the Ethiopian minister for Tourism and Culture's (Dr Hirut Kassaw) recent trip to Dublin.

- 1. A copy of the expenses incurred on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) at Hugo's Restaurant, Baggot street, for a "welcome lunch" between the Ethiopian delegation and DFAT on 10 June 13:00-14:15.*
- 2. A copy of all correspondence between DFAT and the Ethiopian embassy in preparation for the meeting from 2018 to the date of the meeting.*
- 3. A copy of the minutes and agenda of the meeting between Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development, Ciaran Cannon TD, and Minister Kassaw that took place on 12 June 16:00 in Iveagh House.'*

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 8 August 2019.

I have identified 13 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 2 of the records and refuse 11 of the records. The 2 records granted relate to the expenses for the welcome lunch for the Ethiopian delegation.

Of the refused records, 10 are email correspondence between DFAT and the Ethiopian Embassy in Dublin relating to Minister Hirut's visit, and one is the internal DFAT report of the courtesy call between Minister of State Cannon and Minister Hirut.

These records are exempt from release under the following two sections of the Act:

- Section 33. (2) (b) (i) which covers diplomatic communications between the Government and its representatives (e.g. its own embassies abroad) and

communications between the Government and the diplomatic representatives of another country in this State (e.g. a foreign embassy).

According to Section 33. (2) (b) (i) a mandatory refusal applies to information communicated in confidence. The Ethiopian government would have an understandable expectation that details of an official government level visit to another country would be treated as confidential and not be made public. Release of the emails between DFAT and the Ethiopian Embassy and the internal report of the meeting between the two Ministers would be viewed by our Ethiopian counterparts as a breach of information shared in confidence, and would therefore adversely affect Ireland's bilateral relations with Ethiopia.

- Section 35. (1) (a), which refers to information obtained in confidence.

Subsection 35. (1) (a) stipulates that a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if the record concerned contains information given to an FOI body in confidence and in the understanding that it would be treated by it as confidential.

If we were to release confidential email correspondence with the Ethiopian Embassy and the confidential internal report of the meeting between Minister of State Cannon and Minister Hirut, as these contain information exchanged on the understanding that it would remain confidential, the Government of Ethiopia (and potentially the governments of other countries) would regard this as a breach of trust and in the future would be far less likely to continue sharing information with Ireland on important matters pertaining to the bilateral relationship.

I have weighed carefully the public interest test in applying section 35. (1) (a) of the Act. However, on balance, the expectation of confidentiality in the state's international relations outweighs the public's interest in being aware of the internal details of Minister Hirut's visit. As such, I am satisfied that the balance favours refusal of these 11 records.

However, in the interests of transparency you may wish to be aware that the purpose of Minister Hirut's visit to Ireland was to share experience in cultural heritage and tourism. The visit consolidated and expanded an existing partnership between Ireland and Ethiopia on cultural heritage, building on a series of cultural heritage exchanges which have taken place between the two countries since 2015, including a visit by Ethiopian officials to Ireland's UNESCO heritage site in Newgrange, and a visit by a representative of Newgrange to Axum in northern Ethiopia to present Ireland's experience in promoting cultural heritage for tourism.

Much of the information regarding Minister Hirut's visit to Ireland, including the courtesy call with Minister of State Cannon, is already in the public domain. The courtesy call on 12 June 2019 in Iveagh House provided an opportunity for the two Ministers to discuss experience sharing on tourism and cultural heritage between Ireland and Ethiopia. During the meeting, a Letter of Intent was signed by both Ministers which outlined a commitment between Ireland and Ethiopia to cooperate in cultural heritage and tourism, particularly in the promotion of cultural heritage sites, the marketing of tourism destinations, and in education.

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,

Nancy Tuohy-Hamill

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Tuohy-Hamill', written over a horizontal line.