



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Our reference: FOI 0054-10/CONS 05-10

15 February 2010

Mr Steve Martin

By e-mail: request-27117-@fco.gov.uk

Dear Mr Martin,

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST

Thank you for your e-mail of 17 January to the Information Rights Team in which you requested information about incidents at international airports under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA or Act). Your request stated:

“Please provide information on the number of reports received by British embassies, consulates or other relevant British authorities, of thefts from or interference with baggage checked in at international airports outside of the United Kingdom by British citizens.”

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does not hold centrally data on thefts or interference with baggage reported by British nationals whilst at international airports.

However, in the event that such incidents were reported to a British mission overseas, they would be recorded on COMPASS, our global consular assistance database. It is possible to search and extract data from COMPASS by selecting a pre-existing attribute, such as country or type of assistance case, however, there is no category for theft or incidents at airports. Given this, we could only identify such cases by searching each database entry in a general category, such as advice or self-help. There are hundreds of cases recorded each month and each of these may have a number of attached notes. We, therefore, believe that the time taken to search the database for cases relating specifically to incidents of thefts at airports, even for a one-month period, would exceed the cost limit under Section 12 of the Act.

As you may be aware, the FCO is not obliged to comply with requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would be likely to exceed 'an appropriate limit'. Section 12 of the FOIA allows public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. For central government, the appropriate limit is set at £600. This figure represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 3½ working days in determining whether the government department concerned holds the information, and to find, retrieve and extract the relevant material.

You may wish to narrow the scope of your request to bring it within the appropriate limit. For example, you could specify certain countries and/or a specific time frame for the information. Whilst there is no guarantee that a search would yield any useful information, we would like to be as helpful as possible and would be happy to consider a reformulated request.

If you have any queries about this letter, or are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint, you should write to Rosaleen Wotton at the above address within 40 days of this reply. If necessary, we will conduct an internal review of how we handled your request. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Consular Directorate
WH4.2 King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2PA

Tel: 020 7 008 0921
Fax: 020 7008 0426
www.fco.gov.uk
E-mail: Louise.Edwards@fco.gov.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaint procedure provided by the FCO. The ICO can be contacted at The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Louise Edwards
Strategy, Communications and Training Group