



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Near East Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

Mr Paul Price

Request-405019-deae03e5@whatdotheyknow.com

10 November 2017

Dear Mr Price

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0956-17

Thank you for your email of 13 October asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked the following questions:

You state that "To date, 201 White Helmet volunteers have been killed, including seven who were tragically murdered on August 12, 2017. "

1. Please provide any proof of these figures that the department holds.

You claim that "We are aware of campaigns to discredit the life -saving work of the White Helmet volunteers by states, organisations and individuals that aim to disseminate false information about them. "

2. Please give any evidence whatsoever of any life saving work by the white helmets, as so far you have refused for various reasons to provide any evidence of your assertions.

3. You state "Mayday Rescue is required to submit regular accounting for its support to Syria Civil Defence" Please provide any accounts for Mayday Rescue that FCO has seen.

4. I repeat that the White Helmets are a terrorist organisation and I believe that the UK government is well aware of this, and that a full investigation of their activities should be made before any funding is provided to them, otherwise the funders are culpable.

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request.

With reference to your first question, Section 41 (1) of the FOIA states that information provided in confidence, as in this case, is exempt from disclosure to the public by the public authority if it would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person. Section 41 also confers an absolute exemption on disclosure, so we do not have to apply a public interest test.

In response to your second question, there is a wealth of evidence you can access which is already available in the public domain, including filmed documentaries; video and written news pieces by international media; bodycam and other footage on social media channels and eyewitness testimony by Syrian citizens. Examples of the documentaries are “The White Helmets” and the “Last Men in Aleppo”, both available at www.Netflix.com. Whilst an example of a news report is the US TV show, 60 Minutes - <https://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-white-helmets-2/>

With reference to your third question, I can confirm that as a recipient of Conflict Stability and Security Fund money, Mayday Rescue is required to submit regular accounting for its support to Syria Civil Defence. However, the information details fall under the exemption in section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, which relates to commercial interests. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure. There is a public interest in the disclosure of commercial information to ensure effective, open and honest use of public money and the scrutiny of public authorities in accordance with published policy and to provide an environment where business can better respond to government opportunities.

However, we consider that this transparency also poses risks in that companies and individuals would, if this information were disclosed, be much less likely to provide the FCO with commercially sensitive information. This would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO. In doing so, it would seriously impair our ability to work for UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world.

With regard to the fourth part of your request. We do not agree and would reiterate what we said in our previous reply to you (FOI 0680-17).

If you wish to make a complaint or if you would like a review of our decision, please write to the FOI and DPA Team at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room K4.04, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH. E-mail: foi-dpa.imd@fco.gov.uk. You have 40 working days to do so from the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may then apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

Near East Department



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