



Department  
for International  
Development



Mr P Price  
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1 February 2018

Dear Mr Price,

### **Freedom of Information Request F2018-017**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request dated 6 January 2018 in which you asked for the following information concerning DFID's controls to prevent aid diversion to terrorist groups, and the Tatweer programme.

*"Lord Ahmad has admitted funding armed groups in Syria (aka terrorists)*

*<https://twitter.com/VanessaBeeley/status/949579609468743680>*

*What controls has DFID got to ensure funding is spent on its intended purposes and what proof have DFID of that ? Please provide that proof"*

DFID has a zero tolerance approach to the diversion of aid funds to extremist groups. We do not tolerate corruption, diversion or misuse of tax payers' funds in any form. Our programmes are designed with a range of safeguards to ensure tight financial controls at each level of the process. All controls and processes are set out in the DFID Smart Rules guide, available [here](#).

All organisations which receive funding from DFID are required to provide evidence about the use of funds, including providing audited financial statements. DFID carries out due diligence on all our partners to assess that they have the necessary controls in place to prevent fraud. This is monitored as part of our monitoring of programme performance and delivery. We are, however withholding the specific evidence and monitoring documentation under section 27 (1) (a) (b) (c) and (d) and (2) and (3) (International Relations), section 38 (1) (a) and (b) (Health and Safety) and section 43 (2) (Commercial Interests) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I have set out an explanation of our use of these exemptions, including our analysis of the public interest factors later in this letter.

*"Which councils has DFID suspended support to?"*

DFID has suspended support to two councils in Idlib and one in Deraa Provinces. However, for security reasons and for the protection of staff DFID, we do not disclose which councils have received funding. We are therefore withholding the information requested under section 38 (1) (a) and (b) (Health and Safety) of the Freedom of

Information Act 2000. I have set out an explanation of our use of this exemption, including our analysis of the public interest factors later in this letter.

You may be interested to note the information relating to our work with the councils can be found in the following links to the UK Parliament website:

[Syria: Overseas Aid: Written question – HL1710](#)

[Syria: Overseas Aid: Written question – HL4197](#)

*“When Tatweer is mentioned, exactly which Tatweer group is meant and what is their website. How is it decided to use then as the arrangement for funding?”*

Tatweer (Arabic for ‘Development’) is the Arabic name for the UK’s Strengthening Governance Structures in Syria Programme managed by Blumont International. Blumont International was contracted to deliver this programme based on the outcome of a fair and transparent commercial process. The aim of Tatweer is to provide technical and financial support to improve the capacity of Provincial and Local Councils, and in turn enable them to provide and/or oversee key services which meet community needs (including needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups). Further information can be found on the [Development Tracker](#)

### **Section 27 (1) (a) (b) (c) and (d) and (2) and (3) (International Relations)**

Section 27 (1) (a) (b) (c) and (d) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the relations between the United Kingdom and any other state or international organisation, or the interests of the UK abroad, or the promotion or protection by the United Kingdom of its interests abroad. Section 27 (2) and (3) provides that information is also exempt information if it is confidential information obtained from a State other than the United Kingdom or from an international organisation or international court.

In applying this exemption we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the strong public interest in transparency and accountability. There is also a clear public interest in raising awareness and understanding of how the UK government works at a country level and in how we aim to engage with partner governments and international organisations in seeking to reduce poverty.

Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in ensuring that DFID and the UK Government are able to promote international development and protect UK interests abroad. To do this there must be good working relationships with other governments and international partners based on confidence and trust. Disclosing sensitive information relating to them or exchanged in discussion between representatives of the UK Government and international partners would be likely to damage these relationships, harm the ability of DFID to work with and influence other donors in eradicating poverty and undermine the UK’s ability to respond to international development needs. This relationship of trust allows for the free and frank exchange of views and information on the understanding that it will be treated in confidence; otherwise it would be likely to inhibit the willingness of international partners to share sensitive information with the UK Government.

As regards Sections 27 (2) and (3) in particular, there is a strong public interest in maintaining the exemption in relation to information provided by partner organisations that have been shared with the UK government in confidence.

Releasing the information requested could significantly damage the UK's ability to deliver government policy and to protect and promote UK interests. This would not be in the public interest.

We have concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information.

### **Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) (Health and Safety)**

We are withholding some information under Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) which provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or endanger the safety of any individual.

Factors in favour of disclosure include that it contributes to a better understanding of how DFID and the UK government works in difficult environments.

Factors against disclosure include the very real danger to individuals if we disclosed the information requested. Because of the difficult security situation in some overseas countries, we feel that the security of many individuals could be seriously compromised. Their safety is of paramount importance and we have, therefore, concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information.

### **Section 43 (2) (Commercial interests)**

Section 43 (2) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person including the public authority holding it. In applying this exemption, we have had to determine whether the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosing this information include the general public interest in transparency in ensuring that dealings with organisations are conducted in an open and honest way. Disclosure could also help to improve public awareness and understanding of the Government's dealings with the partner organisations and governments and the development of business at an international level.

Factors against disclosure are the strong public interest in protecting the legitimate commercial interests of those who share information with DFID. Disclosure of sensitive information could make it less likely that DFID would be provided with commercially sensitive information in the future as our disclosure of this information would be likely to damage their commercial interests. Disclosure could also damage DFID's reputation in the international community and could consequently undermine the department's ability to fulfil its role and to achieve value for money in the use of public funds.

Please contact me, quoting reference number F2018-017, if you have any questions about this letter.

If you are unhappy with the service we have provided and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you should write to the Information Rights Team

at the address shown in the footnote below or email [foi@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:foi@dfid.gov.uk) within two months of the date of this letter.

If you do make a complaint and are not content with the outcome, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted DFID's complaints procedure. You can contact the Information Commissioner at the following address: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

Alison Marshall  
Information Rights Team  
Department for International Development