



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

Our Ref: Fol/Req/20/041

7 July 2020

Dear Ms Dwyer,

I refer to the request of February 17 which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

All correspondence between the Department of Foreign Affairs and members of the public regarding evacuation from China relating to the coronavirus between 1 December 2019 and 17 February 2020.

The period in question was particularly busy, with reports of the virus first emerging in Hubei Province. Our Consular Directorate in Dublin and our Embassy in Beijing handled hundreds of phone calls, reviewed and updated our travel advice, and worked with partners on the ground to arrange for the repatriation of a number of our citizens in late January and again in early February.

I have identified 9 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision part-grant the release of all 9 records.

In relation to these 9 records, the release of which has been part-granted, information has been redacted from all records under Section 35(1) as the records contain information given in confidence and on the understanding that it would be treated as confidential. I believe that the release of this information would prejudice the giving of further similar information to the Department, which would have a major impact on the Department's ability to provide consular assistance in the future. I believe that it is of vital importance to the work of the Department that further similar information should continue to be provided.

In relation to these 9 records, the release of which has been part-granted, personal information has been redacted from all records under Section 37(1). While Section 37(1) Personal Information is a mandatory exemption, I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. I have taken into account the benefit to the public to be given access to correspondence in a manner which demonstrates transparency and accountability of the Department. In the main, the information redacted relates to personal information and does not affect the substance of the record. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information would provide any additional benefit

in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private and have found that there is a clear prerogative for this information to remain private.

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

Ronan Cunniffe
Consular Directorate