

Hon Ron Mark

Minister of Defence

Minister for Veterans



17 OCT 2019

OIA-2019-0218

Harry Robson

fyi-request-11254-04e6a2af@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Robson

On 18 September 2019, you contacted the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) to request information regarding Government of New Zealand engagement with theistic organisations under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). On 24 September the following portion of your request was transferred to Ministers, including myself as the holder of the Defence and Veterans portfolio:

1. *How many meetings have the PM and Cabinet had with theistic leaders and theistic organisations since October 2017?*
 - a. *Which leaders and organisations have been met with?*
 - b. *How many times were said leaders and organisations met with?*
 - c. *How long were these said meetings?*
 - d. *What was discussed during said meetings?*
 - e. *Did said meetings impact on any governmental action (including policy and legislation)?*
2. *Has the PM or members of Cabinet ever met with the "The Family and International Foundation" (USA) or communicated with them, in any capacity (including indirectly)?*
 - a. *How long were these said meetings? Who was involved in and with them?*
 - b. *What was discussed during said meetings?*

In my role as Minister of Defence and Minister for Veterans, I engage regularly with religious leaders, especially military religious leaders, during such events as funerals, battle commemorations, significant anniversaries, and military ceremonies. No substantive discussion relating to government business takes place at these events, and there is no impact on policy or legislation. I am refusing to release details of these engagements under section 18(f) of the OIA, on the basis that that they cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

In addition to this, there are two specific meetings that fall within the scope of your question:

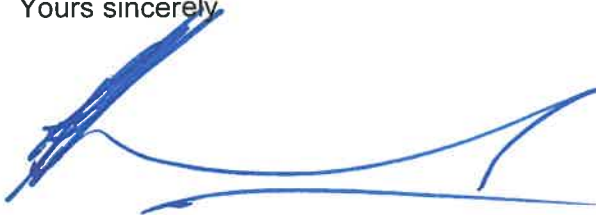
On 22 March 2019 I met with His Excellency Mr Ahmad Bin Abdulla Bin Zaid AL Mahmoud. Mr Ahmad is the speaker of the Shura Council of Qatar, and visited New Zealand as the Qatari representative following the Christchurch attacks of 15 March. As Qatar is a religious state, Mr Ahmad is both a civic and religious leader. This meeting was approximately 20 minutes long, and discussion was confined to expressions of solidarity and friendship on both sides. There was no impact on government policy or legislation.

On 17 May 2019 I met with Father Donato Ogliari, the Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Montecassino, while in Italy to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Montecassino. The meeting was approximately one hour long, and discussion was confined to the history of the Abbey, and the modern practices associated with the running of the Abbey. There was no impact on government policy or legislation.

With regards to the second part of your query, I have not met with the 'Family and International Foundation' since I became a Minister.

Pursuant to section 28(3) of the OIA you have the right to complain to an Ombudsman about my response to your request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ron Mark', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon Ron Mark
Minister of Defence
Minister for Veterans