

# Hon Nanaia Mahuta

MP for Hauraki-Waikato

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Minister of Local Government

Associate Minister for Māori Development



5 July 2022

Lance D. Lavery

[fyi-request-19601-8ed299ee@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-19601-8ed299ee@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Lance D. Lavery

Thank you for your email of 5 June 2022 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

*As Minister of Foreign affairs and therefore acting Principal, why did you or your agent/s advise the Mayor of Wellington Andrew Forster not to allow memorial lights to be lit up on the Michael Fowler Centre for Shareen Abu Akleh?*

*Of all Ministers in Parliament you should know very well the negative impacts of oppression and occupation. Your own Tainui people historically, have suffered due to these inhumane and barbaric practices.*

*In closing I leave you with some quotes and a whakatauki to consider.*

*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." - Bishop Desmond Tutu.*

*"Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured. But I fear greatly that the storm will not pass. It will rage and it will roar ever more loudly, ever more widely." - Sir Winston Churchill.*

*"Ki te kahore he whakakitenga ka ngaro te iwi" - Kingi Tāwhiao Tūkāroto Pōtatau Te Wherowhero.*

You have requested why I or my agents advised the Mayor of Wellington Andrew Forster not to allow memorial lights to be lit up on the Michael Fowler Centre for Shareen Abu Akleh.

Neither I, nor Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) officials, provided advice to Wellington Mayor Foster in relation to lighting up the Michael Fowler Centre in response to the death of Shareen Abu Akleh. Therefore, I refuse your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information you requested does not exist.

The Ministry was approached by the Wellington City Council for its views on the proposal to project the Palestinian flag on to the Michael Fowler Centre on Nakba Day, and asked whether doing so would give offence to the Israeli Embassy. The Ministry responded to a specific question, in a specific set of circumstances. The decision was for the Council to take, which was clear in the advice from the Ministry.

The Ministry has reconsidered the advice it provided, particularly whether the Ministry should have made a recommendation to the Council. Future responses from the Ministry will be limited to providing New Zealand's international policy settings on an issue.

For your information, I have included the advice from the Ministry provided to Mayor Foster in Annex One. Some portions of the information are withheld under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments; and
- 9(2)(g)(ii): to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the protection of officials from improper pressure or harassment.

Where information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. C. Mahuta', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta  
**Minita Take Aorere / Minister of Foreign Affairs**