



Office of the Prime Minister

Prime Minister

Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services

18 AUG 2017

Laura Drew

Email: fyi-request-6102-97a9c4a4@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: PMO 079-2017

Dear Laura Drew

Official Information Act request relating to diplomatic relations with Israel

I refer to your Official Information Act request received on 1 July 2017 which asked for:

"All briefings or advice regarding the restoration of diplomatic ties between the colonial states of Israel and New Zealand; All communications regarding the restoration of diplomatic ties between the colonial states of Israel and New Zealand."

On 26 July 2017 I wrote to you extending the time limit for response until 25 August 2017 to allow time for the consultation needed to be completed. I am now in a position to respond.

Your request has been interpreted as relating to diplomatic relations between Israel and New Zealand since New Zealand co-sponsored the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 of 23 December 2016. Accordingly, we have interpreted your request to be for:

- All briefings and advice regarding the restoration of diplomatic ties between Israel and New Zealand since 23 December 2016;
- All communications regarding the restoration of diplomatic ties between Israel and New Zealand since 23 December 2016.

If this interpretation of your request is not correct, please advise.

Please find enclosed copies of email correspondence that fall within the scope of your request. Some names and contact details have been withheld under the following sections of the Official Information Act:

- Section 9(2)(a), *"to protect the privacy of natural persons;"*
- Section 9(2)(g)(i) as withholding the information is necessary to *"maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any department or organisation in the course of their duty."*

Also identified as relevant to your request were a number of documents which have been withheld in their entirety. The withheld documents are described below.

There was some correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Israel. This correspondence is withheld in its entirety under section 6(a) of the Official Information Act 1982, as the making available of that information would be likely *"to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand."*

Also identified were some documents, including email correspondence, for the purpose of providing advice to the Prime Minister for responding to questions raised by the media. This information is withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Official Information Act as withholding the information is necessary to “*maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any department or organisation in the course of their duty.*”

In addition there was some briefing material provided to the Prime Minister by the Policy Advisory Group of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. These briefings are provided to the Prime Minister in confidence, in order to support him in his role as leader of the Government and chair of Cabinet. These briefings have been withheld under section 6(a), section 9(2)(f)(iv) and section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Official Information Act.

Where the information has been withheld under section 9, no public interest has been identified that outweighs the reasons for withholding that information.

You are entitled to ask the Ombudsman to review this response under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

Yours sincerely


Wayne Eagleson
Chief of Staff

From: [Office of the Minister of FAs]
To: [Office of the Prime Minister]
Cc: [DPMC]; [DPMC]
Subject: MFA exit interview Israel
Date: Thursday, 27 April 2017 8:11:01 p.m.

Hi guys

As an FYI, rough transcript from interview with Vernon today. Similar things said to Audrey.

Cheers

A

You got a few brickbats from Israel I believe from the resolution, I touched on that before. How do you see that in retrospect, were they the only country criticising us or were we doing the US dirty work?

No we certainly weren't. The idea that somehow this was a jack up between Kerry and myself is completely untrue and John Kerry is clear about that. We spent two years on the UNSC, we did take a close interest in this issue. I said we would. Because it's actually an issue that is on the UNSC agenda for regular discussion because it's so important and there had been no progress and I...

I remember you saying to me at the Otago Foreign Policy School, that you were going to do this, sorry to interrupt, it was more than just a passing interest for you wasn't it? Well it's not just about my own view of it, it is the UNSC view of it there are other matters that come up regularly on the Security Council the Cyprus question for example, where they are actually making some really good progress. I've taken a close interest in Cyprus as well, on New Zealand's behalf. But we have been in a position where we have been able to say very positive things about the parties who have been working I think constructively and bravely to try and bring about a solution.

But Australians didn't exactly back you up on that did they?

On the issue of Palestine the Australians expressed a different foreign policy view and I've been pretty clear about this. That we are not a former ally of the US we don't belong to ANZUS as an active member. We make our own foreign policy decisions and I'm very comfortable with the ones we made in that respect.

Let's be clear that the Israelis withdrew their Ambassador, the Prime Minister and others are quite keen to try and repair the relationship and I'm not going to complicate their task by saying to much here. All I can say really is that we'd signalled our interest and intentions, we'd tried to engage with all the parties in the best way we could and I'm comfortable where we got to, even though the events that occurred in the final couple of days before Christmas were impossible to predict and difficult to manage.

So you think it is resolvable that we can re instate our friendship with Israel?

I said so at the time and I meant it. I think that New Zealanders would want us to remain on friendly terms/very friendly terms with Israel. But we had some views of longstanding actually about the two state solution about the things that stand in the way of that two state

solution particularly the violence and the incitement on one hand and the settlement process on the other. Now that's what has driven New Zealand's interest in that issue all the way through and I don't think anyone should be surprised to see us line up where we did.

Sent with BlackBerry Work (www.blackberry.com)

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982

From: [Office of the Minister of FAs]
To: [Office of the Prime Minister] [DPMC]; Julie Ash; [Offices of the Prime Minister and Minister of FAs]
Cc: [DPMC] [DPMC]
Subject: RE: Report re Embassy in Israel
Date: Wednesday, 10 May 2017 10:59:55 a.m.

Thanks.

GB was asked about it on Caucus run yesterday - I sent the transcript over yesterday.

[Redacted]
Press Secretary, Hon Gerry Brownlee
[Redacted]

From: [Office of the Prime Minister]
Date: Wednesday, 10 May 2017, 11:55 AM
To: [DPMC] [Redacted], Julie Ash
[Offices of the Prime Minister and Minister of FAs]
Cc: [Redacted] [DPMC]
Subject: RE: Report re Embassy in Israel

Heya, he never said it. I've searched all of Monday's transcripts and spoken with him.

The journalist wrote that line based on a question/assertion put to Minister Brownlee by another journalist yesterday.

They are going to remove it.

FYI [Office of the Minister of FAs]

From: [DPMC] [Redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, 10 May 2017 10:27 a.m.
To: Julie Ash [Office of the Prime Minister]
[Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted] [DPMC]
Subject: FW: Report re Embassy in Israel

Hi all,

Did the PM have any engagements on Monday where the location of NZ Embassy was raised?

Cheers

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Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: HORNE, Stuart (MEA) [REDACTED]
Date: Wednesday, 10 May 2017, 9:28 AM
To: [REDACTED] [DPMC] [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED] [DPMC] [REDACTED]
Subject: Report re Embassy in Israel

[UNCLASSIFIED]

[REDACTED] – as discussed – see the highlighted bit below – link is at the bottom

Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee learning the diplomatic lingo after Israel gaffe

MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

Bill English, Brownlee and Israel

MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

PM Bill English sets the record straight after Gerry Brownlee's comments on New Zealand's co-sponsored UN resolution on Israel.

Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee says he's an "excellent student" when it comes to learning diplomatic speak.

The newly-appointed Minister is being tutored by his officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade after comments which appeared to undermine a New Zealand-sponsored UN Security Council resolution condemning the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

Brownlee admits the comments were his mistake.

Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee has given an assurance he's learned from an early gaffe, describing New Zealand's move ...

Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee has given an assurance he's learned from an early gaffe, describing New Zealand's move to sponsor a UNSC resolution against Israel as "premature".

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982

"The Government's position hasn't changed. What we are trying to do is re-establish diplomatic relations with a country that we've had a long relationship with.

"Under the intense scrutiny of a Radio New Zealand journalist, I used some language that perhaps made that less than clear," he said.

In that interview, Brownlee described the resolution carried out under his predecessor Murray McCully as "premature", and suggested New Zealand should not have moved forward with it unless Israel agreed.

"It's something I've got to take little bit of a lesson from my friends at MFAT who are currently giving me various pieces of advice about appropriate diplomatic language."

But Brownlee gave an assurance: "I'm an excellent student, a great learner."

His comments come after Prime Minister Bill English yesterday said he spoken with his Foreign Minister and was confident they were the comments of someone still "trying to find the right language".

Brownlee - just weeks into the job - had already written to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend an olive branch and try to patch the fractured relationship.

A response to the letter had not yet been received, but Brownlee said he would not have expected to in such a short period of time.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334, passed late last year, demanded Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem" and said the settlements had "no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law".

It was historic for the fact Permanent Member United States - which has veto rights - abstained, allowing the resolution to pass. Netanyahu described the passage of the resolution, also co-sponsored by Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela, as an "act of war".

He recalled Israel's ambassador from the New Zealand posting, and restricted the ability of New Zealand's representative to enter the country.

Diplomatic relations have been close to non-existent since. But while the Government stood by the resolution, it was working on nudging back in to Israel's good graces.

Yesterday, English appeared to suggest a New Zealand embassy in Tel Aviv would be preferable to one in Turkey's Ankara, cross-accredited to Israel.

Brownlee would not be drawn on whether that was likely to occur in the short-term.

"Let's just see where all this takes us over the next couple of weeks and months," he said.

"In the end, the real point here is that we've had a long-standing relationship with Israel and we want to keep that relationship alive. And we think by doing that, we'll be able to encourage peaceful solutions to the difficulties they face."

- Stuff

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/92371798/foreign-minister-gerry-brownlee-learning-the-diplomatic-lingo-after-israel-gaffe>

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From: [Office of the Minister of FAs]
To: [Office of the Prime Minister]
Cc: [Office of the Minister of FAs and DPMC] _FDIA; LANGLEY, Jeff (DS EMA); [redacted]
Subject: Line on Israel
Date: Tuesday, 30 May 2017 9:25:31 a.m.
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Hey – this is what I ended up sending to Audrey last night.

"We've not received a formal reply from Prime Minister Netanyahu but we wouldn't necessarily expect to. We remain committed and positive about restoring diplomatic relations between our two countries."

Thanks,
[redacted]

[Office of the Minister of FAs] **Press Secretary | Office of the Hon Gerry Brownlee**
Minister of Foreign Affairs | Minister Responsible for the Earthquake Commission | MP for Ilam
L7.4 The Beehive | Wellington | [redacted]
[redacted]
 [facebook.com/gerrybrownleemp](https://www.facebook.com/gerrybrownleemp)  www.beehive.govt.nz

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