

7th November 2006

Lord Falconer
Selborne House
54 Victoria Street
London
SW1E 6QW

Dear Lord Falconer

I am writing to convey the Campaign Against Arms Trade's concern about the proposed changes to the workings of the Freedom of Information Act.

It seems to us that it was premature to have reviewed the Act at this stage. The Information Commissioner has yet to rule on any of the four requests I have appealed to him. Three different government departments are involved, but all regard arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the same exemptions (commercial confidentially and international relations) have been quoted in all cases. I am sure that, given the number of time extensions asked for during the internal review period, a far amount of staff, and possibly ministerial, time has been expended by all three departments on this.

Once the Information Commissioner has ruled on these cases, and possible appeals against his ruling heard, precedents will be established. This will mean that departments know what kind of information they must provide and that which they can refuse. This should cut down enormously on the amount of time taken to decide on the response to requests and will also mean that those of us asking for information will not ask for that we know will not get.

CAAT also thinks the limit on the number of requests that can be made in a given time period is arbitrary. The requests we have made have tended to be in batches in connection with a particular piece of research.

I hope you will think again before making the proposed changes.

Best wishes,

Ann Feltham
Parliamentary Co-ordinator

Copy to Rt Hon Alan Beith MP, Chair Constitutional Affairs Committee