

2 May 2024

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OIA 29280

Tēnā koe Jacob

I refer to your email of 3 April 2024 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

'Please may I request all sitreps, briefings and reports regarding Phillip Mehrstens from November 2023 to today's date?'

The information in scope of your request is withheld in full 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;
- 6(d): to avoid endangering the safety of any person; and
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy.

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

It is over a year since Phillip Mehrstens was taken hostage in Papua, with his safety and wellbeing remaining the Government's top priority. Disclosure of the information requested would pose a serious and substantial risk to Mr Mehrstens' safety, a risk that might well eventuate. In these circumstances you can appreciate that the information we are able to provide publicly is very limited at this time. We are doing everything we can to secure a peaceful resolution and Mr Mehrstens' safe release, including working closely with the Indonesian authorities and deploying New Zealand consular staff. We are also supporting Phillip's family, both here in New Zealand and in Indonesia.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett
for Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade