

Challenges

Both the number of access to information requests and requests to the Department for personal information have continued to increase rapidly, as have the number of consultation requests from other departments and foreign governments. It is anticipated that interest in information held by the Department will continue to grow as public awareness also increases.

The Department also faces certain challenges that may not affect other federal departments, including:

- the need to obtain documents held at diplomatic missions overseas in order to respond to requests
- the high volume of cases requiring consultation with third parties and other governments and international organizations or multilateral bodies
- the complexity and sensitivity of requests received

Furthermore, given the nature of the Department's work, employees must often deal rapidly with urgent international crises. Thus, the Department must regularly balance the competing priorities of response to an urgent situation on the one hand with requests for access to information on the other.

Progress

Over the course of the last fiscal year, DFAIT released more than twice the number of pages to requesters than the previous year. The ATIP division reviewed 91,990 pages of information, up from 36,119 last year. In addition, we completed processing one of the largest access to information requests in the history of the *Act*. This request required review of approximately 1.5 million pages of records.

In anticipation of increased interest in government response on-line, DFAIT used this extraordinary request as a unique pilot project and completed processing of all information electronically. Using this experience, the Department is now proceeding with plans to expand this capacity.

DFAIT also completed processing of 83.6% more requests for personal information than were completed last year, and dealt with a 90.3% increase in requests under the *Privacy Act* from identified Investigative Bodies. While the requirements of the Access to Information Act have been a subject of media attention during the past year, the Department also has mandatory and important obligations under the *Privacy Act* that cannot be ignored.