

Organization and Implementation

The Coordinator for Access to Information and Privacy Protection (ATIP) has been delegated full authority to exercise the powers of the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. The Office of the Coordinator is responsible for the development, co-ordination and implementation of effective policies, guidelines and procedures to manage the Department's compliance with these Acts. All requests submitted to the Department within Canada or at Canadian missions abroad are replied to by the Office of the Coordinator in Ottawa. The Coordinator reports to the Deputy Legal Adviser. In addition to the Coordinator, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Minister for International Trade, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Political and International Affairs, the Legal Adviser and the Deputy Legal Adviser are also designated with full powers, and all Heads of Mission are designated to act under Section 8(2)(m) of the Privacy Act.

The Canadian Government holds records and information received in confidence from foreign Governments. Other federal Government institutions are encouraged to solicit the assistance of the Department in determining the extent to which documents were obtained in confidence or the extent to which disclosure of information would be injurious to the conduct of international affairs. The Coordinator's Office is responsible for consultations with foreign Governments which are normally undertaken through Canadian posts abroad. Requests by foreign Governments regarding the declassification and disclosure of Canadian documents are also processed by the Office. The Department also collects, under various legislative authorities or otherwise, an appreciable amount of commercial information in confidence from companies operating abroad or dealing with foreign Governments. In the event of requests for such information, the Department, if it determines it has no substantive interest in the information, will undertake appropriate notification or consultation with interested parties before disclosing any records. The Coordinator's Office also has frequent occasion to convey personal information to federal investigative agencies.

In addition to the Coordinator, the ATIP Office has a complement of four officers and two support staff, all of whom are dedicated to Access, Privacy and related functions on a full-time basis. The mix of rotational foreign service and non-rotational specialist staff reflects an appropriate balance between broad ATIP experience and detailed knowledge of the policies and workings of a large and multifaceted department. The only position to change incumbents during the year was that of the Coordinator.

Case Load

In FY 1996-97, the Department received 328 Access requests and 51 Privacy requests, for a total case load of 379 formal requests for information. In addition, the Office processed 246 consultations from other Government departments and 162 requests for personal information under Section 8(2)(e) of the Privacy Act. There were 68 informal requests. Included in these statistics are a number of requests for consultation with foreign Governments for release