

PRESS LINE

UNPAID MINOR TRAFFIC VIOLATION/PARKING FINES

- We were notified by the appropriate local authorities of 5,484 (£506,475.00) unpaid fines attributable to Diplomatic Missions/International Organisations for 2006.
- FCO representations to affected missions netted payments totalling £22,713
- Where necessary, the FCO will draw the attention of Heads of Mission to particular persistent offenders, warning of possible further action.

If Asked

- Missions can be asked to transfer or withdraw persistent offenders.

LONDON CONGESTION CHARGE

- All Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations based in the UK are expected to pay the London Congestion Charge.
- When the Congestion Charging Scheme was introduced in London in February 2003, the British Government carefully considered whether the UK was under an obligation to exempt Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations from charges under the scheme.
- It concluded that Diplomatic Missions should not be exempt from the Charge as it is a charge for a service rendered under Article 34 of the VCDR and as such is analogous to a parking fee or a toll charge which Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations are required to pay.

- As Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations are immune from prosecution in the UK courts, there is no legal course of action which the FCO or Transport for London can take to enforce payment of the Charge or the fines. Under the Vienna Convention, however, Diplomatic Missions have an obligation to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. The British Government therefore expects all Missions to respect the laws and regulations of the country and pay the Charge.
- The FCO appreciates the financial impact of the scheme on Diplomatic Missions. It approached the Mayor of London about possible concessions for the diplomatic community in 2002, but the Mayor was not prepared to grant any concession.
- Residents inside the congestion charging zone, which include Ambassadors and staff from a number of foreign missions, benefit from a 90% discount.
- Each month, Transport for London sends a statement to Diplomatic Missions of non-payment of penalty charge notices relating to the London Congestion Charge.
- A large number of missions pay the congestion charge on time and do not incur fines.
- Earlier this year, Transport for London provided the FCO with a list of those Diplomatic missions that had not paid penalty charge notices from the introduction of the Charge.
- In April, the FCO wrote to the worst offenders, asking them to pay the fines before 20 May. We informed them that failure to pay the fines would result in them being included in a list presented to Parliament. We also wrote to all missions owing over £1000.00 in fines urging them to settle their debts with Transport for London.

- As a result of the western extension of the Congestion Charge zone, the FCO has received formal notification from a number of diplomatic missions in London that they no longer intend to pay the charge.

(Only if asked)

- How many? 19 to date.
- Which ones? We would need to consult the missions before revealing.
- What is FCO's view on whether the Congestion Charge is a tax?
- Our view has been that the Congestion Charge is a charge for which there are no legal grounds to exempt diplomats.

Only if pressed on the Western Extension:

- We are studying the points made by diplomatic missions that have made formal representations.
- If asked about talks held with the Americans: The FCO can confirm that UK and US officials met for good faith discussions on the Congestion Charge in November last year.

If Pressed

- The total of outstanding penalty charge notices incurred by Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations since the charge was introduced in February 2003 amounts to *some £6.9 million*.