

DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE - FIREARMS - SELECTED DOCUMENTS REPRESENTING
U K. PRACTICE - INCIDENTS WITH THE CUBAN EMBASSY AND VIETNAMESE
EMBASSY.*

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

PERSONAL

All Heads of Mission

26 September 1988

Dear Head of Mission,

You will be aware from earlier circulars and from recent incidents that the United Kingdom authorities take a very grave view of breaches of United Kingdom firearms regulations by members of the staff of diplomatic missions in London. I should therefore like to draw your attention again to my circular note of 28 March 1988 which sets out those regulations and the way in which they apply to diplomatic missions. I am enclosing a further copy with this letter.

I should like to draw your attention in particular to paragraph 3 of that circular, which makes it plain that Firearms Certificates will not be granted either to Diplomatic Missions for use by security staff, or to individual members of the Mission for weapons which are intended for personal protection. You will appreciate that this means that the possession of weapons by any members of your staff for such purposes while at post in the United Kingdom is illegal. This is drawn clearly to the attention of all diplomats on arrival in London in the Memorandum which is issued with their identity cards. I should however be grateful if you would ensure again that all members of your staff are aware of these regulations, and would re-emphasise to them the importance of complying fully with them.

I should finally like to emphasise the personal responsibility which the British authorities look to you to exercise as Head of Mission in respect of the conduct of your staff, in particular in ensuring that they comply with their obligations under Article 41 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to respect the laws and regulations in the United Kingdom.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd) Roger Hervey

R.B R. Hervey

Vice Marshal Diplomatic Corps.

* These documents are provided by W J Dixon, First Secretary (Information) British High Commission, Canberra.

The Vice Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps presents his compliment to Their Excellencies the Heads and Acting Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations in London and has the honour to draw to their attention the Regulations concerning the import, acquisition, possession and use of firearms in the United Kingdom.

The Vice Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps wishes to remind the Diplomatic Corps of the very grave view taken by the United Kingdom authorities if the Regulations are not observed. Any breach would normally lead to a request for the withdrawal of the offender from the staff of the Mission or Organisation

Responsibility for protection of Missions and Organisations and their staff rests with the United Kingdom authorities. Fire-arms Certificates are not granted either to Diplomatic Missions for weapons for use by security staff, or to individual members of the Missions for weapons which are intended for personal protection. It is against the law for firearms to be held without the appropriate certificate. It is the duty of the police to prevent the unauthorised carriage of firearms and persons suspected of carrying a firearm are likely to be questioned.

Similarly, responsibility for protection of visitors rests with the United Kingdom authorities. The Vice Marshal would be grateful if Missions would ensure that all visitors, as well as travellers in transit, are made aware of the Regulations in order to avoid embarrassment with the authorities at ports of entry/departure.

Weapons carried by VIP visitors, diplomats or protection officers must be declared on arrival. Travellers in transit should be made aware that if weapons are to be transferred from one aircraft to another these, too, must be declared on arrival in order that the transfer of the weapons can be facilitated without delay. It is illegal for firearms to be held by passengers without authority in the transit areas, or in any part of the United Kingdom airport. It is also an offence under Section 4 of the Aviation Security Act 1982 for weapons to be carried without authority in the cabin of British registered aircraft (whether the aircraft is in the United Kingdom or not) or in any other aircraft operating from United Kingdom airports.

The relevant provisions of the current Regulations governing the issue of Firearms Certificates for sporting purposes are set out in the Annex attached.

The Vice Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps avails himself of this opportunity to renew Their Excellencies the Heads and Acting Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations in London the assurance of his highest consideration.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE
LONDON SW1
28 March 1988

DESCRIPTION OF UK FIREARMS REGULATIONS GOVERNING ACQUISITION AND POSSESSION OF FIREARMS FOR SPORTING PURPOSES (FIREARMS ACT 1982)

Paragraph 24 of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Memorandum on Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities has been amended as follows:-

All members of a Mission must comply with the requirements of the Firearms Act 1968, by obtaining:

- (a) Firearms Certificates in respect of any arms and ammunition (apart from smooth bore guns with a barrel not less than 24 inches in length);
- (b) Shotgun Certificates in respect of smooth bore guns with a barrel not less than 24 inches in length;
- (c) Firearms Certificate in the case of certain replica (imitation) firearms;

which they possess or intend to acquire by purchase or importation. The Firearms Act 1982 extends the provision of Section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 to certain imitation firearms. Applications for all types of certificates may be made to A4, Firearms Branch, The Metropolitan Police, New Scotland Yard, Broadway, London SW1H 0B9 (Tel No: 01-230 2597). Payment of the fee chargeable is waived on the issue of such certificates to diplomatic agents and administrative and technical staff. Certificates will not be issued in respect of firearms which are intended for personal protection.