

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

# Department Notice

**Office of Origin:** A  
**Announcement Number:** 2009\_03\_082  
**Date of Announcement:** March 16, 2009

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## Message from the Secretary on FOIA

On his first full day in office, President Barack Obama signed two memoranda on openness in government – one ushering in a new era of transparency in government, the other ordering a presumption of disclosure in the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The State Department will be at the forefront of making this commitment a reality. Former Secretary of State and President James Madison was a strong champion for an informed citizenry. On March 16 – President Madison’s birthday – we will honor his commitment to transparency and openness as we celebrate Freedom of Information Day.

We should have no doubt about the public’s interest in our work. Millions of pages of historical foreign policy records are declassified each year and transferred to the National Archives, where they are second only to genealogical records as the most researched of all collections. Every year, we process more than 6,000 requests for disclosure.

As a Department, we should respond to requests in a timely manner, resolve doubts in favor of openness, and not withhold information based on speculative or abstract fears. Preserving the record of our deliberations, decisions, and actions will be at the foundation of our efforts to promote openness. At the same time, the exigencies of diplomacy, the concerns of our foreign partners, and national security interests may sometimes limit the degree to which we can be completely transparent about our current activities. We need every Department employee to manage the challenge of informing the public and protecting information in a way that fulfills the President’s strong commitment to transparency.

Copies of the President’s memoranda and further information regarding the Department’s FOIA Program, the availability of our records, and our information assets may be found at [www.foia.state.gov](http://www.foia.state.gov).