



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,  
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI)– 24 MAY  
2011**

**Venue:** 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Globe House  
89 Eccleston Square  
London  
SW1V 1PN

**Present:**

Dr Khalid Koser (KK) ( <b>Chair</b> )	-	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Andrew Jordan (AJ)	-	Immigration and Asylum Chamber
Jerome Sabety (JS)	-	UNHCR (Geneva)
Dr Christopher McDowell (CM)	-	The City University, London
Dr Michael Collyer (MC)	-	University of Sussex
Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (EFQ)	-	Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University
Dr Ceri Oeppen (CO)	-	University of Exeter
Stuart Harwood (SH)	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency (Representative)
Alex Marinkovic (AM)	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency (Representative)
Richard Lederle (RL)	-	UK Border Agency (COIS)
Robin Titchener (RT)	-	UK Border Agency (COIS)
Roseanna Atherton (RA)	-	UK Border Agency (COIS)
Stewart Wheatley (SW)	-	UK Border Agency (COIS)
Pauline Crichlow (PC)	-	UK Border Agency (COIS)
Adrian Russell (AR)	-	UK Border Agency (Chief Executive's Office)
Dr Julie Vullnetari (JV)	-	University of Sussex (Reviewer)
Dr Nadje Al-Ali (NAA)	-	SOAS (Reviewer)
Professor Shaun Gregory (SG)	-	Bradford University (Reviewer)

**Apologies:**

Dr Laura Hammond (LH)	-	School of Oriental & African Studies
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<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Action point</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<p>The Chief Inspector of the ICIUKBA gave a brief introduction and welcomed the new members of the group. He also thanked former members Alan Deve, Alexandra McDowell (UNHCR) and Gottfried Zürcher (ICMPD) for their excellent work and contributions to the group.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information. He thanked the former members and welcomed the new members. He thanked existing members for the previous two years. KK expressed his thanks to Akua Brew-Abekah for her support to the IAGCI in the last meeting.</p> <p><u>The new members are:</u></p> <p><u>Dr Ceri Oeppen</u>, Associate Research Fellow in Geography at the University of Exeter and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Development Studies at SOAS, University of London. Her current research looks at organisations that support asylum seekers in the UK and USA, and return migration from Norway and the UK. Her doctoral research explored the interactions between trans-nationalism and integration for Afghans living in California. Prior to becoming a member of the IAGCI, between 2004 and 2010, she completed six evaluations of the Afghanistan country report for the panel and its predecessor APCI</p> <p><u>Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh</u> is <i>Departmental Lecturer in Forced Migration</i> at the Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford). She has conducted research with Middle Eastern and North African refugees in Algeria, Cuba, Egypt, France, South Africa, Spain, Syria and the UK, and she focuses in particular on the intersections between <a href="#">gender</a>, <a href="#">generation</a>, <a href="#">religious identity</a>, and <a href="#">asylum</a> across these locations. Her current research project (with Nando Sigona) explores the experiences of <a href="#">stateless Palestinian, Kurdish and Roma populations in France, Germany, Italy and the UK</a>. Elena is the Director of the Refugee Studies Centre's <a href="#">International Summer School in Forced Migration</a>, in addition to being the book reviews editor for the <a href="#">Journal of Refugee Studies</a>; she has previously worked as a legal advisor for refugees in Cairo (with AMERA-Egypt), and as a refugee case-worker with Amnesty International Australia's</p>	

	<p>Refugee Team.</p> <p>Michael Collyer is Senior Lecturer in Geography at the University of Sussex. He has held visiting fellowships at the University of Colombo, American University in Cairo and Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tetouan, Morocco and his research is focused on forced migration to and from North Africa and the Euromediterranean region and in South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka. He is associate editor of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.</p> <p>KK outlined what he thought were the IAGCI's main achievements over the past 2 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing the change from the APCI to IAGCI</li> <li>• Maintaining public confidence</li> <li>• Continued improvement of COIS reports</li> </ul>	
<p><b>1.0</b> <b><u>Chair's report</u></b></p>	<p>KK gave a brief update on the group's activities. KK met with COIS in Australia. They had stated they were impressed with the IAGCI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KK was interviewed by Eurasyllum (<a href="#">available on Eurasyllum website</a>)</li> <li>• KK will meet with the Austrian equivalent of the IAGCI in early June</li> <li>• CM attended the last Refugee and Asylum Forum meeting and reported there were no issues arising from the meeting for IAGCI</li> </ul>	
<p><b>2.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissioned</u></b> <b><u>Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Albania</u></b></p>	<p>The Albania report was reviewed by JV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She found the report impressive and was generally representative, thorough and the coverage was extensive however several issues needed more attention (medical infrastructure, violence against women); at times there was an over-reliance on US statistics; and better use could be made of Albanian sources</li> <li>• She compared the 2011 review to the 2004 review and found that many of the recommendations from the earlier review had been taken up, as had some of the recommendations from the cross-cutting reviews on LGBT and returns</li> </ul> <p>In response RL explained:</p>	



<p>3.1</p>	<p>section on Iraqi's working for UK and US</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She could understand why history cannot be covered in detail in reports but it was useful for referential purposes</li> <li>• Whilst she understood that reports reflected asylum claims she was surprised gender was not coming up in those claims</li> <li>• She was unsure of COIS access to resources but felt there were books and journals they could have used</li> <li>• There was a problem with quantitative data particularly the figure which referred to the casualties of the Iraq war. There should be alternate figures provided</li> <li>• She also saw some of the language as being problematic and highlighted the phrase 'western collaborator'</li> </ul> <p>KK noted;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The huge improvement between this report and the last Iraq report which NAA also reviewed</li> <li>• That COIS responses to the review were fuller than those on the Albanian review</li> </ul> <p>RL stated that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COIS were happy to consider any source to which they have access</li> <li>• COIS responses did differ but sometimes only a simple comment is needed to show agreement. Iraq was a complex report so the comments from COIS might reflect that complexity</li> </ul>	
<p>3.2</p>	<p>There followed a general discussion about the Iraq report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EFQ wanted to see a grading system in place for COIS comments or standard terminology. That way the group could assess the level of commitment from COIS regarding a recommendation made by the reviewer. RL thought the comments could become action points</li> <li>• SW stated that gender received light coverage because women from Iraq tend not to make asylum claims. AJ confirmed that he had never encountered a female asylum claim from Iraq. RL explained that COIS reports were tailored to asylum claims</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AJ was complimentary of the report and COIS' subsequent comments as he felt the process provoked a useful debate. He also thought that, given NAA was a real expert on Iraq, then her suggestions should be acted on. He also wanted to know more about the quantitative data, i.e. what was the source?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissioned</u></b> <b><u>Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Pakistan</u></b></p>	<p>The Pakistan report was reviewed by SG who reviewed the last report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SG spoke about the report he reviewed in 2009. He said it was generally very sound in use of sources, balance and focus. He highlighted 76 areas for comment of which 45 were substantive. In the 2011 report he noted that around ¾ of his comment areas were actioned meaning that his 2009 report had been taken seriously by COIS.</li> <li>The 2011 report was sound and the focus good, in particular the section on floods was very well done</li> <li>He highlighted 53 areas for comment but recognised that criticism is easy so tried to provide alternative sources and text</li> <li>He was pleased that most of his comments were picked up and that COIS responses were very good</li> <li>It was felt that some relevant sources had been overlooked or disregarded as a result of COIS preferring to use sources less than 18 months old. SG recommended that whilst this was good practice, it would be sensible to accept some key sources, even where the information was older than this.</li> <li>He considered what had changed since 2009 and highlighted the floods and violence against Christians and Shia Muslims but he was glad that these things had been covered by COIS</li> <li>He felt the timing of the report could be better because the report was produced in January yet most NGO, Government and IO reports were published in the spring. The COIS report should be produced after the NGO reports were published</li> </ul> <p>There then followed a general discussion about the Pakistan report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KK asked SG if he was concerned about</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4.1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KK asked SG if he was concerned about</li> </ul>	

	<p>the ¼ of his comments areas that were not picked up but he was not as these were very minor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RL was pleased that the review was positive and thought it was good to compare the 2009 report with the 2011 report. He explained that COIS reports were produced in April then subject to 3 QA checks so it was difficult to schedule exactly when a report would be published. However there were fortnightly updates on the floods and the COIS request serves to plug the gaps. He commented that COIS could be flexible with dates to allow for elections etc.</li> <li>• AJ noted a comment on pg 10 by a politician. Whilst this was a view from an individual he felt it was a valuable comment</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissioned</u></b> <b><u>Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Occupied</u></b> <b><u>Palestinian</u></b> <b><u>Territory</u></b></p>	<p>KK explained to the group that the researcher who had been commissioned to carry out the review of the OPT report was unable to do so because of illness. It also precluded her from completing the review at a later date so another invitation to tender would be put on the website</p>	
<p><b>6.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissioned</u></b> <b><u>Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Women's</u></b> <b><u>Issues</u></b></p>	<p>KK explained to the group that the researcher who had been commissioned to carry out the cross cutting review on women's issues was unable to do so because of a family issue. The researcher would however be able to complete the review in time for the next meeting</p>	
<p><b>7.0</b> <b><u>AOB</u></b></p>	<p>KK spoke about his aims of the IAGCI for the next two years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further integration of the IAGCI into the ICI UKBA</li> <li>• Continued assistance to improve COIS' capacity e.g. training, improve links to country experts</li> <li>• Raising the profile of the IAGCI internationally</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7.1</b></p>	<p>There was general discussion surrounding any other business.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RL spoke about COIS' work in raising IAGCI profile. He presented to the Inter-Governmental Consultations (on migration, asylum and refugees) on the work of the</li> </ul>	

7.2	<p>IAGCI and had emails of interest as a result from Switzerland and Austria. AJ said that he often speaks at conferences attended by Judge's and it would assist him if he could have a page of the history of the IAGCI and of COIS</p>	<p><b>RL to produce information sheet detailing COIS' history and current organisational structure. KK to send IAGCI presentation to all</b></p>
7.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CM asked RL about the European Asylum Support Office and the progress made in setting it up. RL explained that they had appointed a chief executive and were currently looking at future projects. However there was no head of COI yet</li> <li>• KK asked the new members for their observations after their first meeting. EFQ felt it was very constructive and hoped that COIS followed through on its comments. SH explained that there was a process to ensure this. The Chief Inspector of the ICI UKBA can make recommendations to the UKBA as suggested by the IAGCI. If these are not addressed then he can go to the Immigration Minister. There could be a problem if the perceived lack of action was as a result of cost but if that was an issue then that could also form the basis of a recommendation</li> <li>• CO questioned the breadth of the IAGCI's mandate. Whilst they couldn't look at Operational Guidance Notes she wondered if they could look at the COIS request service. KK felt that this was possible. CO asked about the numbers of requests received. RL said there were 1900 in 2009 and 1500 in 2010</li> <li>• KK wondered if a visit to COIS by new IAGCI members would be worthwhile. RL thought it was both useful and possible. KK suggested a review on the request service and thought the visit could also act as a scoping exercise</li> <li>• MC stated that he thought the meeting was interesting and positive. He was fully behind the idea of a visit to COIS. He wondered whether a tick list of action points resulting from the review would add value to the process, possibly incorporating a grading system. KK suggested the reviewer list the key priorities and COIS to grade them as to how certain they were to act on them</li> </ul>	<p><b>RL to liaise with new IAGCI members to arrange a visit to COIS in Croydon.</b></p>
7.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SH spoke about the Chief Executive of ICIUKBA's keenness to promote the work of the IAGCI within UKBA. He would be attending staff events and could talk about</li> </ul>	

<p>7.5</p> <p>7.6</p> <p>7.7</p>	<p>the work of the IAGCI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CM referred to a previous comment by RL explaining that COIS didn't have access to all the sources the researchers did. RL reiterated this and that cost was the issue as COIS couldn't afford to pay the necessary subscriptions to obtain access to those sources. CM and MC agreed to look into the possibility of COIS accessing University subscriptions to access the sources</li> <li>• KK referred back to a suggestion made by CM to allocate one review to one IAGCI member to comment on. He thought it was a good idea and wanted to implement it for the next round of reviews. The group agreed to pilot this</li> <li>• There was a discussion surrounding the timing of the next meeting and it is still to be agreed however the commissioning of reviews would continue as normal. The meeting would last longer to reflect the unusually large agenda</li> </ul>	<p><b>CM and MC to discuss access to subscription services with their respective universities</b></p>
<p><b><u>Next Meeting</u></b></p>	<p><b>Next meeting to be held in October 2011 from 1000-1700hrs in Globe House.</b></p>	