



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI)– 25 JAN
2011**

Venue: 5th Floor, Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London
SW1V 1PN

Present:

(Chair) Khalid Koser (KK)	-	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Akua Brew-Abekah (ABA)	-	Independent Chief Inspector's office
Stuart Harwood (SH)	-	Independent Chief Inspector's office
Richard Lederle (RL)	-	UK Border Agency
Breasha Lowe (BL)	-	UK Border Agency (Chief Executive's office)
Robin Titchener (RT)	-	UK Border Agency
Jerome Sabety (JS)	-	UNHCR (Geneva)
Laura Hammond (LH)	-	School of Oriental & African Studies

Apologies:

David Bozzini (DB)	-	University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland
Michael Collyer (MC)	-	University of Sussex
Alan Deve (AD)	-	UNHCR (London)
Mohammad Hedayati	-	University of Durham
Andrew Jordan	-	Immigration and Asylum Chamber
Christopher McDowell (CM)	-	The City University, London
Gottfried Zuercher (GZ)	-	International Centre for Migration Policy Development

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Action point</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<p>The chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.</p> <p>KK expressed his thanks to Alex Marinkovic for his support to the IAGCI over the past year.</p>	
1.0 <u>Chair's report</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The minutes from the IAGCI in September were accepted. ○ KK commented on the increased number of applications that had been received in response to the invitation to tender (ITT) for reviews for the current countries. LH explained that she had sent the ITT to the www.ForcedMigration.org and www.iasfm.org websites. She also distributed the announcement through the University of London's Africa, Near and Middle East Studies Centres (which have distributions far beyond London). In addition, the timing of the process had provided ample opportunity for all parties to contribute and has worked well. KK is keen for this to be replicated in future processes. ○ KK informed the group that he had attended the 3rd European Country of Origin Information Sponsorship meeting in Budapest and had presented on the work of the IAGCI. This had been well received; the IAGCI was seen as a model for other countries to follow. ○ KK will also be interviewed by Eurasyllum on the work of IAGCI. ○ KK stated that the IAGCI had made a commitment that one of its members would attend the Refugee and Asylum Forum (RAF). SH agreed to attend the last RAF on behalf of IAGCI as no other member had been available. 	<p>ABA to circulate the RAF minutes to members when they have been completed.</p>

<p>1.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SH provided feedback from the RAF held on 18th Jan. The main areas raised were - Whether any reviews undertaken by IAGCI would look into the application of COI reports as well as the content. - Whether the next cross-cutting report on gender would assess the extent to which the recommendations from Nina Allen's review for the Advisory Panel on Country Information in 2007 had been adopted and followed through. - On-going concern about the use of OGN's. <p>On points (1) and (3) SH commented that John Vine felt that it was outside the scope of the IAGCI to look at these specific areas but that the COI inspection currently being undertaken by the inspectorate may take account of these issues. On point (2) KK will draft ToRs for the cross-cutting review on gender and intends to include this element</p>	<p>KK to draft ToRs on the cross-cutting review on gender for comment by the group</p>
<p>1.2</p>	<p>KK reviewed the action points from the last IAGCI meeting. The outstanding issues were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ COIS researchers could/should attend IAGCI meetings. It was agreed that this would be beneficial. ○ COIS to be able to contact country reviewer directly if appropriate. 	<p>KK to amend TOR to allow for occasional attendance of COIS researchers</p> <p>KK to amend TOR to allow for appropriate contact by COIS researchers when necessary</p>
<p>2.0 <u>IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: Algeria</u></p>	<p>KK introduced the review by Michael Collyer. In essence this was seen as a good COI report that had been well sourced although there were some missing references.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The group discussed the use of FCO sources. COIS confirmed that specific instructions had been obtained on how this information should be sourced and should be presented in a transparent manner. COIS would nonetheless carefully monitor – notwithstanding this COIS regard FCO information as an important additional source and will continue to approach them where necessary. ○ In addition, RL stated that COIS would 	

	<p>expand on the use and coverage of Diplomatic Assurances in the new report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RL stated he was content with the reviewer's comments and especially appreciative that their efforts to make the latest version of the report more concise and focused than the previous version had been recognised. ○ RL accepted the benefits in broadening the source range to include those not published in English. He confirmed that it is something that COIS is starting to implement but identified financial pressures as potential limitations. KK believed this issue could be flagged to John Vine to pursue. ○ JS offered to be a contact for COIS if they needed to cross check any UN sources. This would be useful for differentiating between policy statements and factual statements. 	
<p>3.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Bangladesh</u></p>	<p>KK introduced Dr Benjamin Zeitlyn who reviewed the Bangladesh COI report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BZ commented that the report provided a good overall guide to the country, however, there were issues around referencing, spelling mistakes and accessibility of sources. ○ RL stated that new templates are being developed that largely address the formatting issues raised by BZ ○ BZ raised an issue about the accessibility of sources. He argued that if COIS wanted to place an emphasis on accessibility then they should only use freely available information. ○ RL accepted that relying on wholly publicly accessible sources within the reports would be preferable but many useful themed based sources were only available by subscription. As a result and with limited finances COIS seek to subscribe to those that offer the best value for money. ○ (by email) CM asked whether COIS could explore links with London universities to obtain access to a larger range of subscriptions. RL agreed this is an area they could explore. ○ (by email) CM asked whether it might 	

	<p>make sense for country reviewers to see the OGN's before reviewing COI reports to provide them with an understanding of UKBA's priorities in that specific country. RT stated that the main asylum/human rights issues arising in a given country were already set out in the introductory letter sent to reviewers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (by email) CM stated that it may be useful for reviewers to look at recommendations made by previous reviewers for the same country and also assess whether they had been implemented when conducting their own review. RL agreed this would be beneficial. LH stated that this should be included in the TOR. ○ RT asked whether the group would consider commissioning the same people to conduct reviews for consistency. SH stated that there was no reason reviews could not be commissioned on the basis of writing for example three reviews over an extended period. 	<p>KK to add review of previous recommendations to TOR</p> <p>KK to consider whether a process of regular reviewers is feasible for IAGCI</p>
<p>4.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Eritrea</u></p>	<p>David Bozzini (DB) joined the meeting by conference call to present his review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DB began by clarifying that he considered that there were "some" factual errors and misrepresentations in report, not significant as had originally been written. ○ DB commented that the report could have included a more diverse range of sources and in some instances the sources that were used were not accessible. ○ DB thought the inclusion of an ethnic map was not necessary and could be misleading. DB also commented that certain areas of the report could be expanded with more detail. ○ RL thanked DB for his comments and asked if he could provide sources where possible. RL accepted the recommendation about further detail in some sections but suggested that it was not always possible or necessary to provide that level of depth, particularly on matters that arose less frequently in asylum claims. ○ JS suggested that the recent resolution by the Security Council on Eritrea might be an 	

	<p>additional source. DB stated it could be helpful but not for the purposes of the COI report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LH asked whether it would be beneficial for COIS to have documents from reviewers in a format by which COIS researchers can cite from. RL agreed. DB was content for his review to be quoted by COIS. It was agreed that the 'IAGCI review' should be quoted as the source, not the reviewer. 	<p>KK to email reviewers to seek permission for COIS to use reviews as source documentation and include this in the ITT.</p>
<p>5.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews: Iran</u></p>	<p>KK noted that this was a particularly comprehensive review and presented its main conclusions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The main areas of concern raised by the review were the added benefit of translating Farsi documents could bring, a lack of detail in some sections and areas in the report where further sources would be beneficial. ○ RL agreed that a formal translation service would benefit COIS in some areas. KK stated again that he could raise this issue with JV as a point to follow up with UKBA. ○ The group discussed whether there might be the potential of conflict of interest by commissioning reviews of country reports by nationals of that country. KK stated that a consideration of any potential conflict of interest was stipulated as one of the criteria on which tenders are evaluated, and was satisfied that an adequate process was in place not to require a blanket policy. SH stated that the robust responses by COIS to reviewers is also helpful in this regard and should continue. 	
<p>6.0 <u>Inspection on</u> <u>the use of COI</u></p>	<p>Mark Voce (MV) and Sally Allbeury (SA) from the COI thematic inspection team joined the group to provide a briefing on the scope of the inspection, which is still underway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MV stated that the inspection was primarily looking at the consistency in use of COI and how OGN's are used. ○ The inspection team has looked at countries with large, medium and small numbers of asylum applications. ○ SA stated that the team has also consulted a range of stakeholders within the 	

	<p>inspection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK commented that this inspection will complete the process of scrutinising both the content and the application of COI reports and would welcome a report to the group after publication. 	<p>ABA to invite COI inspection team to IAGCI to table report after publication</p>
<p>7.0 <u>AOB</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK gave his thanks to all the COI researchers. ○ KK reminded the group that the appointment of permanent members of the group (excluding UKBA) will be reviewed at the end of April. SH stated that John Vine (JV) will be writing to members to advise them of the process to be undertaken. ○ SH stated that JV wanted to broaden the representation of the group. He would be seeking nominations from LH and CM which KK would consider before making final recommendations. ○ RL explained to the group that COIS was affected by the spending cuts and may be subject to reduction and reorganisation. KK stated that this would be watched closely and that IAGCI would be concerned if this resulted either in any loss of independence for COIS from policy, or in a reduction in the capacity of COIS to respond to scrutiny from IAGCI. SH confirmed that IAGCI's budget within the inspectorate would be ring-fenced. ○ RL stated that he was keen to build up more information on gender, LGBT persons and children although this would have to be proportional to the amount of claims they receive in these areas. KK stated that the group would re-visit these themes to inspect how COIS were addressing them. <p>The group confirmed that the work plan for May would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Albania ○ Iraq ○ OPT ○ Pakistan ○ Thematic - Gender 	

Next Meeting

**Next meeting to be held on 24 May 2011 from
1300-1700hrs in Globe House.**