



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI)– 19 MAY 2009**

Venue: 4th Floor Boardroom
8-10 Great George Street
London
SW1P 3AE.

Present:

Khalid Koser (Chair)	-	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Dr Laura Hammond	-	School of Oriental & African Studies
Andrew Jordan	-	Asylum and Immigration Tribunal
Gottfried Zuercher	-	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
Christopher McDowell	-	The City University, London
Jerome Sabety	-	UNHCR, Geneva
Alan Deve	-	UNHCR (London)
Nick Swift	-	UK Border Agency
Robin Titchener	-	UK Border Agency
Garry Cullen	-	Office of the Chief Inspector
Alex Cheatle	-	Office of the Chief Inspector (Minutes)

Apologies: Prof. Gareth Stansfield - Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies
University of Exeter

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Action point</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	The chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Chief Inspector's independent Advisory Group on Country Information.	
<u>Chair's report</u>	<p>The chair explained the meeting had been originally due to consider two reports on countries being considered for NSA designation (Turkey and Iraq KRG), but Turkey was not now being considered, following a decision by UKBA not to designate it as NSA.</p> <p>The group noted that at a recent meeting of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum, and Refugees in Geneva that the IAGCI (formerly APCI) was seen as a leader in its field in reviewing selected (UKBA) country of information reports, and making</p>	To review 3 COI reports when each meeting held

	<p>recommendations to help ensure reports were as accurate, balanced, impartial and up to date as they could be.</p> <p>It was agreed future meetings of this group would aim to review three country information reports to make best use of the group's time.</p>	
<p><u>IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: KRG region of Iraq</u></p>	<p>The group discussed Professor Gareth Stansfield's report on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area of Iraq.</p> <p>The chair noted that Professor Stansfield in his opening paragraphs of his evaluation report had commented favourably about the COI report, saying it should prove a valuable resource for UK officials dealing with asylum and human rights cases.</p> <p>It was noted UKBA had responded positively to nearly all of the recommendations made by Professor Stansfield and had amended the COI report accordingly. The chair commented that one of the few critical points in Professor Stansfield's evaluation was around some data gaps in the COI report.</p> <p>The group considered Professor Stansfield's report was very helpful because he set out the information gaps and suggested where further information was needed. For this reason the group agreed his report should be used as an example of best practice for distribution to future authors.</p> <p>The group then considered whether UKBA should provide a more detailed response to paragraph 1.4. This concerned upcoming issues in 2009/10 (elections, disputed territories; hydrocarbons law, constitutional reform, etc.) that suggested the situation in KRG was of a developing nature.</p> <p>The group discussed whether reports should incorporate known future events because a country (or region) deemed safe when a COI report was published could deteriorate quite quickly as a result of future events. The UKBA representative explained that in addition to the COI reports, case workers were informed of significant country changes that could affect the assessment of cases. Some further discussion ensued, with differing views being expressed about whether reports should include such information. It was finally agreed the response from UKBA was sufficient (i.e. Decision makers could not be expected to factor into their decisions what might happen in the future).</p> <p>At paragraph 2.02 the group agreed that reference to the production of oil was not relevant to Asylum claims.</p> <p>A final comment from the group said they needed to be careful that their role and the reports they commissioned on the COI reports to ensure the group did not end up in some sort of "editorial role". Such a role would not sit comfortably with the group.</p>	
<p><u>Report on the first meeting of the Refugee and Asylum</u></p>	<p>The IAGCI member (Dr Chris McDowell) who attended the Refugee & Asylum forum on the group's behalf explained the work of the forum and the purpose for which it had been set up. He noted that the forum had welcomed the Chief</p>	

	<p>The letter from the IAS raised similar issues around membership, the name of the group, its terms of reference and OGNs.</p> <p>The Chair referred to the reply to the ILPA letter by the Chief Inspector, which he endorsed. He added he would be replying to the IAS letter in due course. He accepted the issues being raised where important, but confirmed they had been considered during the formation of the group by the Chief Inspector and, to a lesser extent, by members of the former APCI.</p> <p>The group confirmed they attended these meetings in their personal capacities, but clearly used the knowledge and experience they had gained in their work disciplines to guide their thinking in connection with COI reports. They also confirmed their sole aim was to try and ensure COI reports were as accurate, balanced, impartial and up to date as possible.</p> <p>In connection with the issue of having a UKBA member on the group, it was agreed their presence was important to ensure these meetings were effective. Some discussion ensued around whether they should be invited to the group meetings rather than sit as a member. The group decided in the end that this point should be reviewed by the Chair in consultation with the Chief Inspector.</p> <p>The group then discussed OGNs and were clear they did not fall within the remit of this group; rather they fell within the remit of the Chief Inspector.</p>	
AOB	<p>The chair proposed that this meeting now considered which countries to commission reports on next. The main criteria agreed for selecting reports for review were (1) number of asylum applications and (2) how recently COI on the country in question had been reviewed by IAGCI. It was agreed that UKBA management information reports on the number of asylum cases being made was valuable in deciding which countries to commission reports on next</p> <p>The group decided that they would consider comments from stakeholders and other sources when considering which COI reports to review.</p> <p>Following further discussion the group decided to review Pakistan, Zimbabwe and India. Sri Lanka was not considered due to the speed of change within the country at the present time.</p> <p>The group agreed a provisional date of 8 September for the next IAGCI</p>	<p>UKBA representative to produce a list of top 20 applicant countries and when they were last reviewed at the next & subsequent meetings.</p>