MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA, INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI) EXTRAORDINARY MEETING– 17 FEBRUARY 2010

Venue: 1 Great George Street
              London
              SW1P 3AE.

Present:

Khalid Koser (Chair)	-	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Gottfried Zuercher	-	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
Christopher McDowell	-	The City University, London
Dr Laura Hammond	-	School of Oriental & African Studies
Jerome Sabety	-	UNHCR (Geneva)
Alan Deve	-	UNHCR (London)
Nick Swift	-	UK Border Agency
Richard Titchener	-	UK Border Agency
Richard Lederle	-	UK Border Agency
John Vine	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency
Stuart Harwood	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency (Representative)
Alex Marinkovic	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency (Representative)
Garry Cullen	-	Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency (Representative)

Apologies: Andrew Jordan   -   Asylum Immigration Tribunal

	Agenda Item	**Issue**	**Action point**
1.0	Introduction	The chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information Extraordinary Meeting. Nick Swift introduced Richard Lederle to the group, informing them that Richard was his replacement and would now attend the IAGCI meetings instead of him. KK welcomed Richard, who then spoke to the group, giving some background to his work history.	

2.0	Purpose of an extraordinary meeting	KK spoke to the group about the purpose of the meeting. He felt that one year after the inception of the IAGCI was a good time for the group to review its work. KK had provided an agenda to provide a basis for discussion. It was not prescriptive and he was happy for it to be added to.	
2.1		JV thought it would be helpful to inform the group of what he wanted from the meeting and from the IAGCI in general. He said it was widely accepted that the APCI had worked well and had lead to an improvement of country information, and that there was great value in the IAGCI. He wanted the IAGCI to be fully incorporated into his inspection programme on a more formal basis by using the same core criteria the inspectorate uses for its inspections for dealing with COI. This would also create appropriate distance between COIS and the inspectorate as in other inspections. The IAGCI should receive a report, decide on what to accept or reject, then inform him of their decision, for his further action.	
3.0	IAGCI Membership	KK raised the issue of UKBA (COIS) membership of the IAGCI and whether this should continue in its present form. GZ spoke for COIS to be present to provide a response to a review. He felt that UKBA could be used as a resource rather than being a full member. KK proposed that COIS have their membership withdrawn and the group agreed, but it was decided that COIS should attend regular meetings for the reasons given by GZ.	**UKBA to have membership withdrawn but still be invited to participate in regular IAGCI meetings.**
		KK suggested that COIS' invitation could extend to the specific country reviewer. The group decided their presence would be useful, and they would be invited at the discretion of the Chair.	**IAGCI to invite COIS country reviewers to IAGCI meetings which discussed the their review**
3.1		The next discussion centred on whether the expert reviewer should be present at the IAGCI meeting which discussed that review. JS stated it was useful to have them there as they could explain their comments. KK stated the same. NS agreed and said that if it was useful for COIS to attend then it was also useful for the expert.	**Expert reviewers to continue to be invited to IAGCI meeting discussing their reports**
3.2		KK asked the group for their opinions about whether Refugee and Asylum Forum (RAF) members should continue to have a seat made available for them at IAGCI meetings. KK felt the option for RAF attendance was useful as they would have constructive comments to make. The group decided that RAF members could attend where their specialisation was thought to be relevant and valuable, and upon the invitation of the Independent Chief Inspector. GC reminded the group that RAF members were able to	**RAF members to continue to have a seat**

3.3		contribute to IAGCI meeting agendas as the RAF meetings had now been scheduled for about two weeks prior to IAGCI meetings for that purpose. The group then discussed membership in more general terms. JV asked how IAGCI members had been selected. KK explained that current membership was a mixture of an inheritance from APCI and a round of appointments which resulted in CM and LH. KK informed the group that current appointments to the IAGCI would expire at the end of April 2011. LH said closer to the time that membership expires the IAGCI should give JV their recommendations for future membership. JV suggested that an appropriate time for this would be September 2010.	**at the IAGCI table where their expertise added value.** **Criteria for membership to be decided** **Membership to be discussed at IAGCI meeting in September 2010**
4.0 4.1 4.2	IAGCI Terms of Reference	It was agreed that the terms of reference would include a paragraph stating that the IAGCI could support the ICI in wider inspections where COI was relevant. JV thought that thematic inspections could provide a rich vein of work which the IAGCI should undertake, and looked forward to the forthcoming review of 'return issues'. It was also agreed that the terms of reference would include a paragraph covering the idea that the IAGCI could present a 'business plan' to the ICI to take forward particular projects. Terms of reference were then discussed further. CM noted that sometimes the phrase 'helping to ensure that information is relevant' is included in the terms of reference but other times was omitted. KK agreed to rectify that and make sure it was always in.	**Terms of reference to include the notion of the IAGCI submitting a business plan to the ICIUKBA.** **KK to ensure that the terms of reference always contains the phrase 'helping to ensure that information is relevant'**
5.0	Reporting	It was agreed that the IAGCI Chair should submit a report to the ICIUKBA at the end of each meeting, identifying in particular recommendations that IAGCI considers important to carry out but that COIS has rejected.	
6.0	Meetings	It was then discussed whether or not there should be more than three meetings a year. KK noted that IAS had recommended that the IAGCI meet more often. JS suggested making the meetings longer than 3 hours, GZ agreed and suggested 4 hours, KK agreed also. LH felt that if the IAGCI divided their resources they could be more efficient, if two of them worked on one report for instance.	**Meeting to remain 3 times a year but would be extended to 4 hours.**

6.1		KK informed the group that certain stakeholders felt the IAGCI should meet whenever a country was being considered for NSA designation. He suggested facilitating this by a virtual meeting in normal circumstances, but that a physical meeting might be necessary where several reports were being discussed, or where the designation under consideration was particularly sensitive. GZ felt a virtual meeting would normally be fine. JV added that he was informed by the Home Secretary when a country was being considered for NSA designation. NS added this was a ministerial commitment.	**JV to inform IAGCI when a country is being considered for NSA designation. IAGCI will normally hold a virtual meeting but will meet physically if needed**
7.0	Commissioning reviews	KK asked if the current procedure for selecting COI reports for review was transparent enough. The group discussed this, felt the process could be more transparent and agreed that the best option would be present an annual work plan identifying in advance the reports to be covered.	**Establish annual work plan for reviews**
7.1		The group then discussed whether the procedure for selecting reviewers was transparent enough. KK explained the current process; an invitation to tender is put on the ICIUKBA website for 14 days as well as emails being sent to the directors of relevant research centres. If there is no response then KK will ask colleagues to suggest possible candidates. A candidate would then submit their CV, budget, and a note of interest to KK who would make a recommendation to GC. GC would then make a decision based on that recommendation. GC suggested alerting RAF members when reviewers are needed. JV felt the process should be kept under review but recognised that the process wasn't presenting a problem at the moment. GC suggested using core competencies to assess CVs. KK agreed to develop criteria for assessing tenders.	**KK to develop criteria to assess tenders**
		The group then discussed whether they should consider whether potential reviewers also serve as expert witnesses against UKBA in the selection process. JV felt that the best option would be ask potential reviewers to declare any potential conflict of interest and that this would be considered in the selection process.	
7.2		KK asked if there was a need for more detailed guidance or further information for reviewers however the group felt that there was sufficient guidance. NS said that in a background brief COIS could explain the reasons and vision for the report to pre-empt some of the comments that reviewers often make that are not really relevant for COIS reports.	**NS to provide background brief on COIS reports.**

8.0	Inspection	KK asked if the IAGCI should take a formal stance on whether or not it accepts expert reviews and which conclusions and recommendations it accepts. There was a detailed discussion on this point.	
		KK mentioned that there may be resource implications for COIS arising from a more rigorous and extensive inspection process, and JV said he could recommend that COIS are given greater resources were this to become a problem.	
		The group then discussed whether a re-review of every report was necessary to ensure that the recommendations approved by the IAGCI had been included. It was agreed that this would not be necessary systematically, but might be on occasion. Where a re-review takes place the original reviewer would normally be commissioned to undertake it.	
9.0	**AOB**	KK asked if there was any other business. There was none. He thanked everybody for attended and in particular thanked NS for all his work in APCI and IAGCI stating that neither would have been as successful without him.	