



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI) ON 29TH
MAY 2012**

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

Present:
Members Khalid Koser (**Chair**) (KK) - Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Laura Hammond (LHm) - School of Oriental & African Studies
Michael Collyer (MC) - University of Sussex
Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (EFQ) - University of Sussex

Representatives from ICIUKBA
Stuart Harwood (SH) - Independent Chief Inspector's office
Melanie Harris (MH) - Independent Chief Inspector's office

Representatives from COIS
James Stephenson (JS) - Head of COIS, UKBA
Ralph Clarkson (RC) - UK Border Agency
Robin Titchener (RT) - UK Border Agency
Roseanna Atherton (RA) - UK Border Agency
Jacqui Niven (JN) - UK Border Agency
Eugenio Bosco (EB) - UK Border Agency

Representative from Specialist Appeals Team UKBA
Andrew Smith (AS) - UK Border Agency

Commissioned reviewers
Alan George - Libya Review
David Rampton (DR) - Sri Lanka Review
Linda Hitchcock (LH) - Vietnam Review

Apologies:
Andrew Jordan (AJ) - First Tier Tribunal
Christopher McDowell (CM) - The City University, London

<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 requested that credit be noted within the minutes for all the hard work and valuable contributions that Alex Marinkovic made to servicing all previous IAGCI meetings before moving onto another post within the Home Office.</p> <p>KK also took the opportunity to express his thanks to the authors of the reviews and reports that were to be discussed at today's meeting.</p>	
<u>1.0 Chair's report</u>	The minutes from the IAGCI meeting in February 2012 were accepted.	
<u>1.1</u>	<p>KK reviewed the action points from the last IAGCI meeting. The outstanding issues and updates were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK thanked those IAGCI members that had already provided a brief biography of both themselves and the organisations they represent. KK urged those that are still to provide biographies to do so at their earliest convenience via Stuart Harwood. ○ KK apologised to the group that he had not as yet been able to conclude action point 3 of the last minutes by arranging for one of the new IAGCI members to attend an RAF meeting. ○ COIS provided an update on the use of subscription services, explaining that they are unable to annex information found on subscription services to their reports due to copyright issues and are still in the process of establishing whether this is also the case for excerpts and will keep this Group advised accordingly. ○ KK advised that both action points 5 and 6 have now been completed. ○ KK advised that Laura Hammond had now looked at the women's issues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IAGCI members who have not already done so, please forward biographies onto Stuart Harwood 2. KK to arrange for one of the new IAGCI members to attend the next RAF meeting. 3. COIS to determine whether longer subscription service excerpts can be used in COIS reports and report back at next IAGCI meeting

	<p>checklist but had yet to circulate her findings to this Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK updated the Group on action point 11 from the last meeting on widening the scope of IAGCI tenders. He explained that he currently had a small group of applications to review but that applications had dropped off and he was relying on word of mouth by Panel members to try to recruit additional reviewers. ○ Action point 12 has now been completed in that the work plan on the web-site has now been amended. ○ KK explained to the Group that he was still giving thought to action point 13 of the last meeting e.g. as to whether to review interim information produced by COIS. 	<p>4. Laura Hammond to update IAGCI members on her review of the women’s issues checklist</p>
<p>2.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Libya</u></p>	<p>KK introduced AG who reviewed the Libya report and OGN.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ AG commented that overall he was impressed with the Libya report. ○ With regard to recommendations made in his Review but not accepted by COIS, AG firstly explained that the Europa World information used in the report was incorrect. Where ‘main towns’ had been listed, these were in fact a list of administrative districts. ○ AG went on to explain that frequently – particularly under Colonel Gadaffi rule - what was documented as fact did not necessarily accord with what was happening on the ground in Libya. Some parts of the report therefore, contained mistakes where COIS had detailed documented information which was incorrect. ○ With regard to COIS’ comments that to date they had not processed any claims related to honour killings, AG’s advice was that although this happens infrequently, it is still worth mentioning in the COI report. ○ With regard to AG’s recommended inclusion of the sub-heading “Extra-Judicial Killings”, COIS explained they would require further information to support inclusion of this topic. AG undertook to provide COIS with further information. 	<p>5. Alan George to provide further information on</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In respect of COIS’ decision not to accept all news articles proposed by AG, they explained that although the articles are useful, they could not fill the report with unlimited stories as the report would become unwieldy. AG recognised that not all the material would be used but suggested that stories relating to the current lack of a stable Government in Libya should feature, as this may impact on future asylum claims. ○ AG also explained that he felt there was a contradiction between the single-sentence section on Page 138, of the report, 23.07 and that of 23.13; the latter he felt being far closer to reality than the former which should be deleted to avoid unnecessary confusion. COIS explained they wanted to maintain both paragraphs as the provision of information from a number of different credible sources would allow readers to reach a balanced conclusion. AG expressed concern with this approach, explaining that readers would have difficulty reaching a just decision if this was based upon conflicting information, which is incorrect in respect of 23.07. KK recommended COIS listen to what the Libya expert is telling them; KK went on to explain that experts can be quoted within COI reports as sources of information. ○ Finally, a discussion took place on the issue of Palestinians in Libya and it was agreed by all that it was worth including in the Report as it may ultimately lead to asylum claims. AG agreed to assist COIS with references in this respect. 	<p>Extra-Judicial Killings to be added to the Libya COI Report</p> <p>6. COIS to decide upon the most relevant asylum claims news updates provided by AG to include in the COI Report</p> <p>7. COIS to consider removing section 23.07 from Page 138 of the Libya COI Report in accordance with advice received from the Libya expert</p> <p>8. AG to assist COIS with references for the Libya COI Report in respect of Palestinians in Libya</p>
<p>3.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews: Sri</u> <u>Lanka</u></p>	<p>KK introduced DR who reviewed the Sri Lanka report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DR opened his review by explaining that he had been pleased that the COI Report provided a good overview of the current situation in Sri Lanka; it is also balanced with plenty of sources of information. He had however, found some gaps and issues in respect of structuring. DR also felt there were serious gaps and omissions which 	

	<p>could impact upon the outcome of asylum claims, e.g. no mention of the 'shadow war' between the LTTE and the GoSL and the corresponding abductions and disappearances of both Tamil and Muslim civilians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ KK praised the thoroughness of DR's review and also took the opportunity to feed back the views of those members who were absent from today's meeting. BT, CO and CM were all pleased with the review. MC agreed, adding that it was an exemplary review which demonstrated real engagement between the reviewer and COIS, particularly with regard to recommendations that COIS had not initially accepted.○ A brief discussion took place as to why COIS had decided not to accept DR's recommendation to expand upon information relating to the Constitution and the 18th Amendment. COIS explained that additional information would be unnecessary since, in its view, there was sufficient detail in the report for decision makers to gain an understanding of the country situation.○ Finally, EFQ commented that she felt minority communities and stateless claims might also be worth mention in the COI Report as there are likely to be several asylum claims of this nature during 2013 for various political reasons. COIS agreed to give consideration to EFQs comments in this respect.	<p>COIS to give consideration to EFQ's recommendation to add additional information</p>
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		on minority communities and stateless people to the COI Report.
<p>4.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Vietnam</u></p>	<p>KK introduced LH who reviewed the Vietnam report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK fed back to the panel that BT had provided detailed comments on the review under separate cover, which included advice to utilise information contained within UN sources to keep the report up-to-date. CO, KK advised, had also fed back that she felt more advice should be provided on Trafficking issues. LH added to this that men and boys were also affected by trafficking issues but this had not been reflected in the report. LH also questioned whether it was right to flag trafficking under the 'Women's' Section. COIS agreed to review this section to reflect that all genders and age groups could be impacted by this issue. ○ COIS representatives took the opportunity to thank LH for her review and also for the good sources of information she had provided. ○ COIS undertook to implement all 'agreed' recommendations into the COI report when it is next revised. ○ With regard to LH's suggestion to change a number of sections around within the document to ensure sufficient flow of information in given subject areas; although initially this was only partly accepted - due to COIS' current standardised report heading structures - representatives subsequently accepted that these recommendations should be accepted in full for the reasons set out in the Review document. 	<p>9. COIS to consider removing information on trafficking from 'Women's' section to ensure this issue is reflected across children and both genders</p> <p>10. COIS to implement all accepted changes made in this review into the Vietnam COI Report at the point of next update</p> <p>11. COIS to restructure the flow of paragraphs/chapters in the COI Report to ensure effective grouping of subject areas</p>

<p>5.0 <u>OGNs</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The group considered reviews of the OGNs for Libya, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, also prepared by the authors of the COI report reviews. KK thanked the authors for taking on this additional task, and UKBA for attending the meeting and providing a comprehensive response to the issues raised in the reviews ○ The review of the Libya OGN concluded that it was generally accurate, unbiased, and up-to –date. A series of typographical errors were identified. The reviewer also expressed the opinion that in places the OGN was over-optimistic about the security and humanitarian situation in Libya, in part because it used courses that were predicting the likely evolution of events in Libya rather than focusing on current trends. UKBA agreed to limit COI in the OGN to consideration of the current situation. ○ The review of the Vietnam OGN found that it was a reasonably balanced summary of salient information related to its specific policy requirements. One recommendation was that the timetabling of COI reports and OGNs is better coordinated, which UKBA accepted in principle. The reviewer felt that more attention needed to be paid to medical issues and trafficking, to which UKBA responded that the OGN focuses on COI relevant to the most common categories of asylum claim, but that these two specific issues will be reviewed for the next OGN. ○ The review of the Sri Lanka OGN was more critical, identifying a number of thematic problems with the COI in the OGN including omissions, an imbalance of sources, and a lack of analysis, as well as providing detailed commentary on a number of specific sections. UKBA provided its responses to these comments in writing. Discussion focused on two issues. First, the reviewer felt that at times the COI in the OGN privileged state sources over non-state sources including Human Rights Watch and Freedom from Torture, with a particular neglect of Tamil media sources. UKBA replied that it strives to provide a 	<p>12. KK and SH to meet to discuss budgets and options for continuing to provide reviews of both COI reports and OGNs and will report back to John Vine accordingly</p>
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	<p>balanced snapshot of COI material, and does not privilege sources. The comment on Tamil media was not accepted, and UKBA cited as an example the use of Tamil Net.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The second main point of discussion concerned the coverage in the COI in the OGN of risks to involuntary returnees in Sri Lanka. The reviewer felt that the judgment in the OGN that there were not substantial risks had not been properly justified and was not cognizant of recent evidence to the contrary. UKBA felt that recent allegations had been dealt with sufficiently. IAGCI members wanted to register their concerns that the treatment of information concerning the possible risks facing deported Sri Lankan nationals was not adequate, despite UKBA claims that it was. ○ KK opened discussion on the merits of continuing to provide independent expert reviews on OGNs and asked AS if he has had found them useful and, if so, could he handle up to 10 reviews per year. AS responded that the OGN reviews had been useful and that his unit could respond to regular reviews from now on. ○ KK asked SH if the IAGCI budget would cover OGN reviews and SH responded that this may require a reduction of the number of COI reports reviewed per year because of budget constraints. KK suggested that he and SH consult on the IAGCI budget then make a recommendation to the Chief Inspector 	
<p>6.0 <u>Checklist on Women's issues</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK asked panel members if they had any feedback in respect of the recommendations made on the checklist on Women's issues. Panel member feedback included a suggestion to amend the 'Women's' heading on COI Reports to one that reflects that any gender and age group can be effected by the issues currently high-lighted under this heading, e.g. trafficking, rape etc. ○ It was agreed that the generic heading to cover persecution as a result of one's sexual orientation, one's gender etc would be 'Gender' and LHM agreed to reflect this revised title in 	<p>13. LHM to add a 'Gender' heading to the Checklist which will cover acts of persecution that can</p>

	the draft 'Checklist'.	affect all age groups and genders, for discussion at the next meeting
7.0 <u>AOB</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK asked SH how the Panel should ensure its recommendations were implemented by COIS. SH explained that Robert Arnott has recently set up an Audit and Compliance Unit within UKBA to ensure that the Chief Inspector's recommendations are implemented. It was agreed that Robert should be invited to attend the next meeting in October. ○ At this point EFQ took over as chair of the meeting. LHm explained that she and KK had been asked how they go about selecting COI reports for review, with particular reference to concerns that the COI report on Rwanda contains out of date material. COIS pointed out that the Rwanda COI Report has not been revised for several years because the country is outside the top 20 asylum intake countries. If there was an emerging issue, then COIS would provide an update for officials as required. ○ EFQ asked COIS to forward to KK a list of when country reports were last updated. ○ EFQ also requested a survey be conducted of all reports that are currently out of date, the results of which should be fed through to IAGCI. ○ EFQ advised the Panel that the next set of reviews would take place on the following COI Reports and OGNs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eritrea 2. Sudan 3. Somalia 	<p>14. SH to invite Robert Arnott to the next Meeting in October 2012</p> <p>15. COIS to provide KK with a list of when country reports were last updated</p> <p>16.</p>
8.0 <u>Next Meeting</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The next meeting will take place in October 2012 – exact date to be advised by SH in due course 	17. SH to advise Panel members of date and time of next meeting