



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF BORDERS AND IMMIGRATION INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI) ON 16TH APRIL 2013**

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

**Present:**

**Members**

Khalid Koser ( <b>Chair</b> ) (KK)	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Laura Hammond (LH)	School of Oriental & African Studies
Ceri Oeppen (CO)	University of Sussex
Andrew Jordan (AJ)	First Tier Tribunal
Blanche Tax (BT)	UNHCR (Geneva)
Christopher McDowell (CM)	City University, London

**Representatives from ICIBI**

Stuart Harwood	Independent Chief Inspector's office
Charmaine Figueira	Independent Chief Inspector's office

**Representatives from COIS**

Mike Gallagher (MG)	Head of COIS, UKBA
Robin Titchener (RT)	COIS
Ailish King-Fisher (AKF)	UK Border Agency
Janice Campbell (JC)	COIS
Sandeep Sanon (SS)	COIS
David Becker (DG)	Country Specific Litigation Team
Jonathan Wright (JW)	Country Specific Litigation Team

## Commissioned reviewers

Peter Marsden (PM)  
Jon Marks (JM)  
Dr Benjamin Zeitlyn  
Dr Mohammed Hedayati-Kakhki

Afghanistan Review  
Algeria Review  
Bangladesh Review  
Iran Review

## Apologies:

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (EFQ)  
Michael Collyer (MC)

University of Oxford  
University of Sussex

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Action point</u>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<p>The chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.</p> <p>KK apologised for the delay in scheduling the meeting.</p> <p>12 tenders had been received for the country reviews. This was not a large number but the calibre was high. 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>	
<b><u>1.0 Chair's report</u></b>	The minutes from the IAGCI meeting in November 2012 were accepted.	
<b><u>1.1</u></b>	<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"> <li>○ Action point 2. RT had spoken to Jenny Blyth-Speirs (representing Robert Arnott, and Performance and Compliance unit) and pointed out that she had just taken on the role.</li> <li>○ AKF needed to have continued discussions on how recommendations are included in the reports. The section was being restructured before the agency was</li> </ul>	<b>1. SH</b> to facilitate direct contact between LH and AKF.

	<p>returned to the Home Office. AKF invited views and contributions from IAGCI. LH agreed to respond on behalf of the panel and as incoming Chair.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ KK asked that the panel be informed of the new structure and when it would be in place. AKF would send a copy of the new structure when it was in place. A sense of direction should be in place by the end of April/beginning of May.</li> <li>○ KK emphasized that IAGCI places a high premium of COIS research being functionally independent of policy</li> <li>○ SH noted that KK produced a chair's report after each meeting which was forwarded by the Independent Chief Inspector to the Agency's chief executive. To date there has never been any formal acknowledgement or response to it.</li> <li>○ Action point 3 of inviting KK's Austrian equivalent to the IAGCI meeting has not been undertaken. KK will try to facilitate this for LH.</li> <li>○ Action point 4 COIS to write to the panel to formally confirm what recommendations have been accepted into the reports and what haven't. RT said that this was not as straight forward as it seems, especially as there is a significant time-lag between the recommendations being made and the publication of the subsequent report.</li> <li>○ Action point 11. COIS have received the gender checklist from IAGCI and will explain at the next meeting whether/how it is being used in preparing reports.</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. AKF</b> to send copy of new structure when available.</p> <p><b>3. KK</b> to pass on the contact details for his Austrian counterpart to LH</p> <p><b>4. RT</b> to explain at next meeting how COIS use the gender checklist in preparing COI reports.</p>
<p><b>2.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissioned</u></b> <b><u>Reviews:</u></b></p>	<p>KK introduced PM who reviewed the Afghanistan report and OGN.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PM presented the findings of his review, focusing on issues where</li> </ul>	

**Afghanistan**

there appeared to be a divergence of perspectives with COIS..

- KK noted that the majority of PM's recommendations had been accepted by COIS.
- As the COIS researcher was unable to attend RT answered on their behalf. It was a judgement call as to what was included in the report. The researchers try to condense the information that is in the report. They concentrate on current information and prefer to use the most recent sources but there may be occasions when older sources are more appropriate. CO stated that even if a source was over 18 months old it may still be relevant and therefore should be included.
- Regarding point 76 of the report RT said that they would not provide the information but would provide links.
- Blood feuds were difficult to evidence. CO, like PM, was also surprised that blood feuds were not included in the report or OGN. DB noted that blood feuds were not an issue that had been raised and that OGNs had to cover the main issues.
- DB said that the OGN focussed on the issues that commonly arise in claims.
- RT stated that it was difficult for researchers to find information on homosexuality. PM criticised the use of Fox News and Global Gayz as the main sources of information for the report.
- RT stated that claims on the basis of homosexuality may arise and therefore there was a need to have as much information as possible.
- CO suggested that PM's review could be used as a source – PM agreed
- She also pointed out that it wasn't always clear where

**5. RT to speak to CO regarding pre-emptive violence in Afghanistan.**

**6. RT to ensure comments like "noted" and "accepted" etc are used clearly and consistently in responding to**

	<p>recommendations were accepted/not accepted by UKBA despite agreement on this point at the last meeting. RT clarified that 'accepted' and 'noted' actually meant accepted and would be used systematically in responding to the next round of reviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ DB agreed the comment on Sikhs must be changed to alter the meaning. It was difficult to obtain information on the current demographic for Sikhs.</li> <li>○ DB welcomed the opportunity to be able to use the IAGCI review itself as a source.</li> <li>○ BT stated that the UNHCR report on Afghanistan was going through finalisation and once approved she would send it to COIS along with additional sources.</li> <li>○ CM noted that paragraph 31 was a vague response from COIS and raised more questions.</li> </ul>	<p>reviewer comments and that it is clear from the response what action COIS will take.</p> <p><b>7. BT to send UNHCR Report on Afghanistan to COIS along with additional sources.</b></p>
<p><b>3.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: Algeria</u></b></p>	<p>KK introduced JM who reviewed the Algeria report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ JM presented the findings from his report.</li> <li>○ Both JM and KK congratulated the report writer.</li> <li>○ SS accepted all of the recommendations and will continue to monitor changes.</li> <li>○ JM felt that the sources for the report could be expanded but this would require translation from French. KK asked MG about translation services. MG replied that if there was a requirement to translate a document from French to English they could do so.</li> <li>○ BT also raised the issue of language in terms of the requirements for translation. RT said documents were formally translated and were not para-phrased.</li> <li>○ BT asked if the use of English sources creates bias. Should there be a disclaimer saying that the</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. JM to forward relevant sources MG.</b></p>

	<p>report only uses English language sources? It was agreed that this was a good idea – and RT will report back at the next meeting to confirm that this proviso has been inserted in all new reports as appropriate. JM asked if BBC Monitoring was used. KK recognized financial limitations at COIS but if he felt that there was a need to use the service or other services that charge he would put the recommendation to JV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MG stated that COIS used sources that remained within budget.</li> <li>○ KK pointed out that there was no OGN for Algeria and asked if this was common for a top 20 country?</li> <li>○ DB responded by saying that the majority of asylum cases were dealt with by the Special Cases Unit.</li> <li>○ CM felt that the regional setting for Algeria was important and asked whether COIS country reports ever considered regional aspects? RT responded that this took place occasionally, for example where there are significant refugee flows between neighbouring countries. However the structure of COIS allows for exchanges between country report authors working on countries in the same region. LH brought up the issue of Statelessness but this would be covered in AOB.</li> </ul>	<p>7. RT to report back at next meeting on the use of a disclaimer regarding English only sources.</p>
<p><b>4.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissione</u></b> <b><u>d Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Bangladesh</u></b></p>	<p>KK introduced BZ who reviewed the Bangladesh report and OGN.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ BZ presented his review on the Bangladesh report and OGN.</li> <li>○ He felt that overall the current report was an improvement on the last Bangladesh COI report that he also reviewed for IAGCI</li> <li>○ However, he felt that recommendations from his previous review had only been implemented in the specific instances where the</li> </ul>	

	<p>recommendation was made, but that the broader principle underlying the recommendation had not been implemented more widely across the report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ BZ brought up the issue of the neutrality of sources saying that if there was a political bias it should be acknowledged so that the reader would recognise the potential skew.</li> <li>○ KK noted that in this case a new OGN had been published just before the meeting. This was not the OGN reviewed by BZ, and it was unclear to what extent the new version had taken into account BZ's comments on the last OGN. KK noted that more work is needed on the sequencing of report and OGN publications with IAGCI reviews and meetings.</li> <li>○ KK noted that medical information had been taken out of the OGN. JW said that rather than trying to deal with the issue in a couple of paragraphs they had decided to put links in instead to give fuller details. DB wanted a more streamlined/shorter document. KK wondered whether this might not apply to all COI contained in OGNs.</li> <li>○ JW stated that CSLU were due to have a meeting the following day to discuss the format of OGNs. KK wondered whether they might be beginning to move towards the removal of COI from OGN as previously recommended by JV.</li> <li>○ LH felt there should be more guidance for reviewers about how the users of COI reports access and use the material in their work. KK suggested reviewers be given sight of ICIBI's inspection report on the use of COI material.</li> <li>○ LH recommended the use of an index and list of key terms in COI reports.</li> </ul>	<p><b>8. LH to append the "use of COI" Inspection report to the commissioning information sent to reviewers.</b></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ LH supported the use of a table to show contradictory information included in the report.</li> <li>○ She also had concerns over “policy based on policy” in terms of the OGN and COI report drawing on policy documents that may represent policy goals that are not actually fulfilled.</li> <li>○ AJ felt that the report was a highly critical one and that critical comments should not be glossed over. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Page 5 point 2, Referencing, this has been mentioned previously.</li> <li>○ Page, (8), 2<sup>nd</sup> to last paragraph. Lip service was paid but the recommendations were not implemented.</li> <li>○ Hyperlinks were not referred to and were not checked to see if they worked.</li> <li>○ Page 28, basic methodology, referred to a comment from 2008. There are better more recent sources.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ KK asked if the OGN should be re-reviewed. AJ stated that it cannot be relied on.</li> <li>○ CO endorsed the report by BZ and mentioned that these issues have come up before. BT thought that it was too long to leave this report before it was reviewed again.</li> <li>○ KK felt that the OGN should be reviewed ASAP and should take on the comments from BZ and AJ.</li> <li>○ MG said that he would undertake a partial review of the COI report but the report would not lose its place in the order for full review.</li> </ul>	<p><b>9. LH</b> to re-commission BZ to review the new Bangladesh OGN</p> <p><b>10. COIS/CSLU</b> to undertake a partial update of the COI report and to leave Bangladesh in its current position in the sequence for COI reports</p>
<p><b>5.0</b> <b><u>IAGCI</u></b> <b><u>Commissione</u></b></p>	<p>KK introduced MHK who reviewed the Iran report and OGN.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MHK presented the findings of his report.</li> </ul>	

<p><b><u>d Reviews:</u></b> <b><u>Iran</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ KK noted that the reviewer had made some recommendations in previous report which had not been implemented.</li> <li>○ JC thanked the reviewer for their comments on the report. Some previous recommendations were not included due to the length of the report (in excess of 300 pages).</li> <li>○ JC tries to keep things in context and makes judgment calls on which suggestions to include based on the sort of issues that arise in the applications received.</li> <li>○ JC was pleased that MHK agreed that she could use his review as a source document.</li> <li>○ KK asked MHK if he was concerned over the non inclusion of any recommendations.</li> <li>○ MKH's first concern was the accuracy of the account of the legal system. MHK offered to draft something in response to this.</li> <li>○ He was concerned over the removal of medical treatment from OGNs. In Iran this is significant as international sanctions have resulted in shortages of medicines in some cases.</li> <li>○ He was also concerned over the translation of information. Many documents about Iran are in Farsi. He offered to translate relevant documents himself and forward on to COIS..</li> <li>○ KK said that he could include the translation as part of his report so that it can be cited in future reports as a source.</li> <li>○ BT will forward her comments on to COIS</li> </ul>	<p><b>11. BT</b> to forward comments on the Iran report to COIS.</p>
<p><b>6.0</b> <b><u>AOB</u></b></p>	<p>1. BT noted that the UK has recently instated a statelessness procedure, and felt that IAGCI should consider what the implications may be for country information needs. It</p>	<p><b>12. LH</b> to put the issue of statelessness on the agenda for the next meeting and consider a thematic review.</p>

	<p>was agreed to table statelessness as the next meeting and potentially consider it as a topic for a cross-cutting review.</p> <p>2. At the close of his final meeting in IAGCI, after 9 years as chair (either of IAGCI or its forerunner APCI) KK reviewed his time in post and the achievements of APCI and IAGCI.</p> <p>He thanked everyone that had been part of the meetings.</p> <p>LH shared her views about how the panel would progress in the future.</p> <p>RT thanked KK personally and on behalf of the Home Office for his commitment and dedication to the work.</p>	<p><b>13. Panel</b> to send LH views for AKF on the products produced by COIS/CSLU by 24 April.</p>
<p><b>7.0</b> <b><u>Next Meeting</u></b></p>	<p>○ The next meeting will take place later than usual in 2013 (probably September) – exact date to be advised by SH in due course</p>	<p><b>14. SH</b> to advise Panel members of date and time of next meeting</p>