



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI) ON 1ST
OCTOBER 2013**

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

**Present:
Members**

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| Laura Hammond (Chair) (LH) | - School of Oriental & African Studies |
| Andrew Jordan (AJ) | - First Tier Tribunal |
| Blanche Tax (BT) | - UNHCR (Geneva) |
| Patricia Daley(PD) | - University of Oxford |

Representatives from ICIUKBA

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| Stuart Harwood (SH) | - Independent Chief Inspector's office |
| Charmaine Figueira (CF) | - Independent Chief Inspector's office |

Representatives from COIS

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| Robin Titchener (RT) | - Home Office |
| Stewart Wheatley (SW) | - Home Office |
| Jonathan Wright (JW) | - Home Office |

Commissioned reviewers

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| Dr Nadjie Al-Ali (NA)) | - Iraq Review |
| Dr Matt Nelson (MN) | - Pakistan Review |
| Eda Tahiraj (ET) | - Albania Review |

Apologies:

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| Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (EFQ) | - University of Oxford |
| Ceri Oeppen (CO) | - University of Sussex |
| Heaven Crawley (HC) | - University Of Swansea |
| Harriet Short (HS) | - ILPA |
| Michael Collyer (MC) | - University of Sussex |
| Phil Duffy (PHD) | - Home Office |

| <u>Agenda Item</u> | <u>Issue</u> | <u>Action point</u> |
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| Introduction and welcome | <p>The chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.</p> <p>LH introduced PD as one of the new members of the panel. Unfortunately neither HC or HS (both new members) could attend the meeting.</p> <p>LH also to expressed her thanks to the authors of the reviews and reports that were to be discussed at today's meeting. She pointed out that two of the reviewers were colleagues of hers from SOAS. However, for transparency their tenders were evaluated by other members of the panel, and were recommended as the strongest.</p> | |
| 1. Re-structuring at the Home Office | <p>JW from the Home Office Country Specific Litigation Unit advised that Philip Duffy had intended to come to the meeting to discuss plans for where COIS and CSLU were likely to fit in the new Home Office structure, but unfortunately was unable to attend.</p> <p>JW advised that there were ongoing discussions around what service COIS/CSLU would provide in the future and what products they would produce. These discussions were not yet conclusive.</p> <p>SH asked whether it should be Philip Duffy who would receive the Chair's report which had previously been sent to Rob Whiteman and if a more formalised process of acknowledgement could be put in place. JW could not comment on what Philip Duffy would want.</p> <p>AJ asked whether it was "business as usual" until a decision had been made and JW confirmed this was the case.</p> <p>LH offered to meet with PD to discuss reporting and the work of the group.</p> | <p>1. SH to write to Home Office to formalise the acknowledgement of the report</p> <p>2. LH to arrange meeting with Philip Duffy.</p> |
| 2. IAGCI Workplan | <p>LH explained that the previous Chair had submitted a plan of work to the Chief Inspector to review the top 20 asylum claim-generating countries on a cyclical basis.</p> <p>Subject to changes to the top 20, and pending any change following item 1, above, she proposed this continue. This was agreed.</p> <p>Taking account of changes to the top 20, the</p> | <p>3. LH to issue</p> |

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| | next meeting would consider India, Zimbabwe and Syria. The group would also commission a thematic review of LGBT issues. | tenders for India, Zimbabwe, Syria and the LGBT Thematic |
| 3. IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: Pakistan | <p>LH introduced MN who reviewed the Pakistan OGN and COI report</p> <p>MN presented his reviews. The reviews generated some additional points of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MN thought that in general the COI report was good but that many of the links did not work. ○ RT said that the links were to outside websites which were not under the Home Office's control but he would look into it. ○ MN pointed out that there were some very good sources which nonetheless contain 'nuggets' of incorrect information. He wondered if the incorrect points could be highlighted and caseworkers could be pointed to the correct information. ○ RT said it would be beneficial for the information to be triangulated. ○ LH suggested that MN's review could be used as a source to point out the inaccuracies. RT responded by saying that it would be difficult to determine which information was correct and which was incorrect, and that adding ellipses becomes messy and might lead people to wonder what the motives were for omitting some parts of a statement and not others. ○ AJ pointed out that removing paragraphs could look bad and it is better to have it included 'warts and all'. ○ LH asked if MN could provide alternative sources to the five main points he raised. ○ BT pointed out that if a reviewer spots inaccuracy in a source they should point out other more accurate sources for the report. ○ Many were unfamiliar with the Asian Human Rights Commission as a source and were unsure of its reliability. ○ LH suggested that case law should not be the only evidence that should be used and that other sources should be cited. | <p>4. MN to provide alternative sources to the five main points he raised for RT.</p> |
| 4. IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: Albania | <p>LH introduced ET the reviewer of the Albania OGN and COI report who dialled in to the meeting.</p> <p>ET presented her reviews. The reviews generated some additional points of discussion:</p> | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ET thanked the Home Office for their comments to her review. ○ She felt that the OGN used a lot of sources and was up-to-date. ○ A discussion about the OGN's coverage of LGBT issues followed. ○ LH in regards to page 9 of the report there was an assumption that if someone does not make their sexual preference clear that they can 'hide' it. ○ PD asked what information is available on LGBT issues in Albania. ET stated the 2013 EU Progress report on Albania would be published in October 2013 that would be useful in this regard. ○ ET moved on to the COI report. ○ She noted that there was an over reliance on media reports. The author of the COI needs to be careful due to the questionable accuracy and independence of the sources. She said that media reports could be used but it is necessary to counter balance it with academic sources and other verified information. ○ She pointed out that the Roma section needs to be strengthened to reflect the risks that Roma in Albania face. ○ In response to ET's point that corruption was mentioned as a prevalent theme in Albania, LH asked whether political corruption forms a basis for many claims. If it does not, she recommended that it should not be included in the OGN. ○ RT did not know but said it could feature in some cases but could not really comment on this. ○ JW said that it didn't appear to be a major issue as it was not a key part of the OGN, and was provided more as a contextual element. | |
| <p>5. IAGCI Commissioned Reviews: Iraq</p> | <p>LH introduced NA the reviewer of the Iraq OGN and COI.</p> <p>NA presented her reviews. The reviews generated some additional points of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NA felt that in terms of use of sources the OGN was excellent. ○ AJ pointed out that country guidance cases are binding unless there is additional information/evidence is provided. ○ PD asked if the content of the OGN is reliant on the policy framework as to what should be taken into account. ○ JW answered that when they start to draft | |

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| | <p>they look at the basis of the most common asylum claims to determine what is to be included. He would like to build in a section to look at the treatment of women so it can be cross-referenced with other information and the case worker would then be pointed in the right direction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LH highlighted that the OGN did not reflect the latest COI. In addition, case law should be considered along with additional COI information rather than allowed to stand alone as if it were a source of COI. ○ JW stated that country guidance was not COI and would update the report with NA's findings. ○ RT pointed out that the reason why the Iraq COI focused on security (rather than being a full COI report on all themes) was that it was an experiment for the production of future products. ○ NA commented that there needs to be more qualitative information and that it needed to be more specific. ○ LH asked what other information would NA want to add to the COI? ○ NA replied she would like to include information on human security, sectarianism, criminality, trafficking. Those who are being targeted to be killed e.g. politicians, journalists etc. She said that the current framing of security in the report ignores many of the security concerns and risks which women in Iraq face. | |
| <p>6. AOB</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LH confirmed the next countries to be reviewed would be Syria, Zimbabwe and India along with the thematic report on LGBT. ○ MC would be attending the next RAF meeting on Oct. 31, 2013. | |
| <p>7. Next Meeting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The next meeting will take place in January 2014. | <p>5. LH to advise Panel members of date and time of next meeting</p> |