



# U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

## RAIO DIRECTORATE – OFFICER TRAINING

### *RAIO Combined Training Course*

# RESEARCHING AND USING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION IN RAIO ADJUDICATIONS

## TRAINING MODULE

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RAIO Directorate – Officer Training / *RAIO Combined Training Course*

**RESEARCHING AND USING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN  
INFORMATION IN RAI0 ADJUDICATIONS**

**Training Module**

**MODULE DESCRIPTION:**

This module provides guidelines on the use of Country of Origin Information (COI) in adjudicating immigration benefits, petitions, protection determinations, and other immigration-related requests. Through demonstrations and computer-based practical exercises, you will gain experience in conducting COI research on the Intranet and Internet for use in adjudications.

**TERMINAL PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE(S)**

You, the officer, will be able to research relevant country of origin information in order to prepare for, interview (where applicable), and adjudicate requests for asylum (including Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear), refugee status, requests for review (RFR), and other non-protection adjudications in the RAI0 directorate.

**ENABLING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES**

1. Identify the importance of country of origin information in adjudicating requests for asylum, refugee status, and other immigration benefits.
2. Cite to multiple relevant sources of country of origin information.
3. Assess reliability of country of origin sources that are relevant to the adjudication.
4. Explain when it is necessary to cite country of origin information to support a decision.
5. Identify when country of origin information is material to the claim.

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS**

- Interactive Presentation

- Discussion
- Computer-based Practical Exercises

**METHOD(S) OF EVALUATION**

- Practical exercise
- Multiple choice exam

**REQUIRED READING**

1. *Galina v. INS*, 213 F.3d 955 (7th Cir. 2000)

- 2.

[Division-Specific Required Reading - Refugee Division](#)

[Division-Specific Required Reading - Asylum Division](#)

[Division-Specific Required Reading - International Operations Division](#)

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- 1.

- 2.

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - Refugee Division](#)

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - Asylum Division](#)

[Division-Specific Additional Resources - International Operations Division](#)

**CRITICAL TASKS**

<b>Task/ Skill #</b>	<b>Task Description</b>
ILR2	Knowledge of the relevant international human rights conventions related to refugees (2)
ILR3	Knowledge of the relevant sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) (4)

ILR4	Knowledge of the relevant sections of 8 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) (4)
ILR5	Knowledge of international human rights laws and principles (2)
ILR6	Knowledge of U.S. case law that impacts RAIO (3)
IRK2	Knowledge of the sources of relevant country conditions information (4)
IRK12	Knowledge of techniques and methodology for conducting research (4)
IRK13	Knowledge of internal and external resources for conducting research (4)
TIS2	Knowledge of the ECN/RAIO Virtual Library (4)
TIS5	Knowledge of Westlaw legal research resource (2)
TIS8	Knowledge of other Internet-based research databases and resources (3)
RI3	Skill in conducting research (e.g., legal, background, country conditions) (4)
RI5	Skill in identifying the relevancy of collected information and materials (4)
RI7	Skill in identifying information gaps, deficiencies, and discrepancies in data or information (4)
T2	Skill in accessing and navigating ECN/RAIO VL (4)
T3	Skill in accessing and navigating USCIS and other government databases (3)
T4	Skill in accessing and navigating Internet-based research databases and resources (3)
DM1	Skill in applying relevant country conditions information to the claim (5)
DM6	Skill in determining materiality of facts, information and issues (5)
TPM5	Skill in managing resources (4)
TPM6	Skill in organizing case and research materials (4)

**SCHEDULE OF REVISIONS**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Section (Number and Name)</b>	<b>Brief Description of Changes</b>	<b>Made By</b>
05/10/2013	Throughout document	Corrected minor typos, formatting, cites identified by OCC-TKMD.	LGollub, RAIO Training

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Throughout this training module you will come across references to division-specific supplemental information located at the end of the module, as well as links to documents that contain division-specific, detailed information. You are responsible for knowing the information in the referenced material that pertains to your division. Officers in the International Operations Division who will be conducting refugee interviews are also responsible for knowing the information in the referenced material that pertains to the Refugee Affairs Division.

For easy reference, each division's supplements are color-coded: Refugee Affairs Division (RAD) in pink; Asylum Division (ASM) in yellow; and International Operations Division (IO) in purple.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Country of Origin Information (COI) plays a fundamental role in the adjudication of immigration benefits, petitions, protection determinations, and other immigration related requests. Such benefits include, but are not limited to: applications for asylum or refugee status, requests for review (RFR's), intercountry adoptions, waivers of inadmissibility and humanitarian parole requests. COI provides objective evidence against which documentation in the record and the testimony of an interviewee can be viewed and evaluated. You can also use COI as part of a framework to help identify whether an individual may be eligible for the requested benefit.

The importance of COI is emphasized in the INA at § 207(f), which specifically provides for the training of U.S. officials adjudicating refugee cases, and by regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 208.1(b) *Training of asylum officers*. [[RAD Supplement – Introduction](#); [ASM Supplement – Introduction](#)]

The purpose of this module is to provide guidance on the role of COI in RAIO adjudications, namely:

1. How to properly conduct country of origin research
2. How to use COI to prepare for and conduct an interview
3. How relevant COI may be used when determining eligibility

Most of the language, examples and resources contained in this lesson plan are largely protection centric as COI research is primarily conducted and relevant in the asylum and refugee context. However, please note that there are circumstances within the RAIO directorate where COI is used in other contexts such as in adjudication of I-601 Waivers of Inadmissibility, Humanitarian Parole requests and

Intercountry Adoptions as well as other IO form types on a case by case basis. For example, officers in the Humanitarian Affairs Branch (HAB) may occasionally use COI to confirm or supplement information provided in a humanitarian parole application that the applicant is unable to receive adequate medical care for his or her medical condition in the country of origin. Additionally in intercountry adoptions requests, the overseas adjudications officer may research COI to verify the types of civil documents available in a particular country such as birth, marriage, divorce certificates, adoption decrees, and police or prison records. The scope of the research and the manner in which it is used in the adjudication may be different than in the asylum or refugee context, but the research tools and methods are similar if not the same. The information provided in Sections 4 and 5 of this lesson plan are applicable to COI in all RAIO adjudications.

Additional information on COI for the specific adjudications referenced above is provided in the IO supplement and will also be provided in division specific training for the International Operations Division.

## **2 IMPORTANCE OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION**

### **2.1 COI Helps You Elicit Relevant Information and Form Reasoned Decisions**

In almost all types of RAIO interviews, COI is essential to properly:

1. Ask questions to fully develop the interviewee's claim.

Equipped with an understanding of COI, you can better identify the most relevant parts of an interviewee's story, and ask specific, informed questions to develop the appropriate parts of the interviewee's testimony. This is especially true when a confused or inarticulate interviewee has difficulty describing his or her claim; in such situations COI provides you with a framework of reference thus enabling you to form pertinent questions relevant to the interviewee's claim.

2. Evaluate the objective or factual basis of the claim and eligibility.

Proper use of COI provides a context for analyzing eligibility during the adjudication. For example, COI may be used to evaluate claims of past persecution, and enables you to assess more fully the risk of harm to the interviewee if he or she were to return to his or her own country of origin. Additionally, COI helps you identify interviewees who may be subject to a ground of inadmissibility or the persecutor bar. In the asylum context, country of origin information can help you determine whether an exception to the one-year filing deadline may exist.

3. Assess credibility.

COI helps you ask appropriately probing questions to evaluate credibility. For example, COI may prevent you from erroneously finding an interviewee not credible because the interviewee's experiences are foreign to your own experience of how people and governments behave. Familiarity with COI can also help you uncover fraudulent claims.

## **2.2 COI Helps Promote Consistency**

The use of reliable COI promotes consistency in decision-making not only for you, but across USCIS. Basing decisions on reliable, publicly available information promotes accountability and fairness, and prevents arbitrary decision-making. This enables you to further support your analysis and decision. Additionally, proper use of COI helps the decision withstand public scrutiny and/or appeal of an adverse determination.

## **3 ROLE OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION IN THE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM PROCESS**

It is imperative to consult COI routinely, even when you believe that you are familiar with the current situation in a country. Conditions in many countries are often volatile and subject to rapid change.

### **3.1 Pre-Interview Preparation**

Prior to an interview, review the file to determine the basis of the claim. The resources available for doing pre-interview preparation and research differ depending on whether you are interviewing at a USCIS office, or another location such as a detention center or an overseas processing site. [[RAD Supplement – Pre-Interview Preparation](#); [ASM Supplement – Pre-Interview Preparation](#)]

There are many excellent sources of COI readily available, from DHS intranet sources such as RAIO Research Unit products (papers, query responses, News Summaries, RAIO Research Unit Databases, COI on the RAIO Virtual Library, DHS Library, and others), to materials available on the public Internet. The RAIO Research Unit and other sources of COI are discussed later in this module.

### **3.2 Eliciting Testimony at the Interview**

To ask informed questions during the interview, you must be familiar with conditions in the interviewee's country of origin, or if stateless, his or her last habitual residence. You should consider COI to help substantiate each part of your analysis. [[RAD Supplement – Eliciting Testimony at the Interview](#)]

#### **3.2.1 Does the Interviewee Meet the Refugee Definition?**

COI can help you to elicit testimony pertinent to the interviewee's eligibility. For example, COI helps you identify groups at risk.

**Example**

The father of an interviewee from country X “disappeared.” Soon after, the interviewee's family began receiving anonymous threats, so they fled their country. When you question the interviewee as to whether his father belonged to any groups or organizations, you learn that the father was an active member of a union. Although the interviewee does not fully understand why his father's union membership is relevant to his claim, your knowledge of “groups at risk” in the interviewee's country leads you to properly elicit details from the interviewee about his father's union membership.

COI will also help you evaluate incidents of past harm. If the interviewee fled his or her country as a result of events that are or have been widely reported in the media or by human rights groups, you will have an objective basis to assess the interviewee's claims of past harm.

To evaluate an interviewee's fear of persecution in the future, you must determine whether the interviewee's fears of future harm are well-founded. COI will help you evaluate whether there is a reasonable possibility that the harm feared by the interviewee could actually occur. COI provides an objective basis to make this assessment.

Therefore, knowledge of the legal refugee standard must be supplemented with COI to interview properly and to adjudicate a request for asylum or refugee status fairly, in an informed, objective, and consistent manner.

COI will also help you evaluate whether there is a pattern or practice of persecution directed against members of a particular group to which the interviewee may belong or a group whose situation is similar to his or her own. If the interviewee has not suffered past persecution, but fears persecution in the future by a non-governmental actor, then COI will help you determine whether the persecution that the interviewee fears exists throughout the interviewee's country of origin. If you determine that a non-governmental actor is not capable of persecuting the interviewee on a countrywide basis, keep in mind that COI must be combined with an evaluation of the interviewee's personal circumstances to make a complete evaluation of whether it would be reasonable for an interviewee to relocate to avoid harm. (See RAIO Training module, *Well-Founded Fear*, for additional guidance.)

### **3.2.2 Is the Interviewee Credible?**

Often an interviewee has no documentation or witnesses to corroborate a request for an immigration benefit. Country of origin information provides a context for asking relevant questions and evaluating the interviewee's credibility. The more knowledgeable you are about the interviewee's country and any group to which the interviewee claims to

belong, the better you will be able to formulate questions to probe the interviewee's credibility, where appropriate.

Informed questioning may expose inconsistencies and falsehoods in the interviewee's claim. Informed questioning may also help re-establish credibility when something appears inconsistent or implausible at first impression.

### ***Example***

An interviewee claims to have suffered persecution because of his active participation in a political party in 1989. Because you know through COI research that national elections were held in the interviewee's country in 1989, you know to elicit information about the interviewee's participation in the elections (e.g., whom he supported, whom he opposed, the names of opposition parties, etc.). You can then check this information for consistency with country reports regarding the election.

You must use caution, however, in evaluating an interviewee's lack of knowledge regarding events or organizations in his or her country. There are varying degrees of membership in parties or organizations, as well as varying levels of communication within organizations. For example, an interviewee may be unaware of the clandestine activities of part of his organization due to a high level of secrecy within the organization. Additionally, the interviewee may be from a rural area that news does not easily reach, and the interviewee's viewpoint may be extremely localized. An interviewee's gender, lack of education, or low socioeconomic status may also play a role in the type of country of origin knowledge the individual has or can reasonably be expected to have.

In conducting research based on the information provided by the interviewee, you may discover that the information available generally corroborates the information given by the interviewee, or, in some instances, may directly contradict the information given by the interviewee. This can be used in the credibility evaluation. (See RAIO Training module, *Credibility* for additional guidance.)

### **3.2.3 Is the Interviewee Possibly Subject to a Bar or Ground of Inadmissibility?**

COI is critical in eliciting testimony about potential bars or grounds of inadmissibility. The interviewee's activities may implicate certain grounds of inadmissibility, such as national security, terrorist activity, criminal activity, torture, trafficking, genocide, and particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The interviewee may also be barred from eligibility for having been a persecutor, if you find that the interviewee ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of others. (See RAIO Training modules, *Persecutor Bar* and *Grounds of Inadmissibility*, for additional guidance.)

### *Examples*

- Through COI, you have learned that many students at an interviewee's former university were informants who caused other students to be arrested and tortured. You should elicit information to determine whether the interviewee participated in or assisted in the persecution of others.
- If you know that the military unit to which an interviewee belonged engaged in persecution of others, that knowledge will make you more effective in eliciting the information necessary to determine whether the interviewee is barred as a persecutor.
- If you know that the opposition group to which an interviewee belonged sometimes engaged in terrorist activities, you will be more effective in eliciting the information necessary to determine whether a terrorism-related ground of inadmissibility applies.
- If there is a question as to whether a refugee interviewee may have been firmly resettled, country of origin research will be helpful in learning about the rights conferred by a particular status granted to an individual and whether those rights are honored in practice. This information will provide an objective basis for you to evaluate whether the interviewee has been firmly resettled. (See RAIO Training module, Firm Resettlement, for additional guidance.)
- You should allow the interviewee to explain conditions, events, groups, or other pertinent information with which you are unfamiliar. You should remain open to the possibility that the interviewee is providing information not available elsewhere. This should not be a substitute, however, for conducting COI research before and, when necessary, after the interview. Use the information provided by the interviewee to help direct your research.

### **3.3 Using COI Research in Decision-Making**

During the interview, COI can help guide you in eliciting testimony relevant to an interviewee's eligibility for the requested benefit. After you complete the interview, you must evaluate the testimony provided by the interviewee in light of COI.

When making a decision, COI may play a critical role in evaluating:

- credibility
- claim of past persecution or fear of future persecution (including evaluating the objective basis for fear, e.g. reasonable possibility)
- nexus to a protected ground
- involvement in acts of persecution

- possible firm resettlement in another country
- availability of internal relocation
- bars and/or grounds of inadmissibility

COI may or may not be relevant to a given case in the following ways:

- Country reports may match in detail
- Country reports may corroborate the broad outlines of the claim but not specific details
- Country reports may contradict or refute the claim directly

### **3.3.1 Country Reports May Match a Claim in Detail**

It is unusual for COI to corroborate specifically the details of a claim, even a valid claim. Still, this does happen occasionally, in both valid and fraudulent claims.

#### *Example*

An interviewee claims he was founder and editor of an independent daily newspaper in his country. His application includes claims that his paper was the most influential publication in his country, but its critical reporting landed him and his staff in trouble with the government on numerous occasions. His testimony details several arrests of the interviewee, his wife, and other staff members, as well as numerous closings of the paper by the government. The interviewee testifies that the office was eventually burned to the ground and he and his wife were exiled to another country, where they founded another national daily paper. After a military coup in the second country he and his wife were deported because of their paper's reporting on the military junta that took power.

In the example above, COI reports corroborated the specific detail of the interviewee's claim, including the interviewee's name, the name of the newspaper that the interviewee had founded, and the events he detailed. Therefore, in this instance, the country reports matched the interviewee's claim in detail.

An interviewee's claim may be a very carefully crafted fraudulent account, or a genuine claim. Either way, you must test credibility and establish the interviewee's identity. The above claim would initially appear to be valid; now you must complete the analysis in light of the interviewee's testimony. For example, did the interviewee adequately relate other information that was material to the claim? Was he consistently detailed about his role as editor and publisher of a daily paper, his experiences in exile, and his own arrests? In addition, because of the prominence of such a figure, it is logical to expect to find some information about him on an Internet search. An Internet search is not always

possible, depending on the resources available at a given interview site, but if you are able to conduct internet research, does the information available from reliable sources corroborate his story? See Section 4.3 *Reputable Sources for Internet Research* below for additional guidance on conducting internet research.

### **3.3.2 Country Reports May Corroborate the Broad Outlines of the Claim, but Not the Specific Details**

In most cases, available COI will *generally* corroborate an interviewee's claim, but information on the specific details of the interviewee's claim will not be readily available. COI that generally corroborate an interviewee's claim lend credence to the interviewee's story. If the interviewee's own testimony is plausible, detailed, internally consistent, and corroborated in its broad outlines by COI, further corroboration of specific details is not necessary.

#### ***Examples***

A Guatemalan interviewee describes how his remote village is the target of an attack by a local Civil Patrol chief. Because the UN monitoring mission has never visited the area, there are no reports of trouble in the region; however country reports generally indicate that members of the Civil Patrol have carried out human rights abuses against political opponents and others. Additional questioning allows the interviewee to give a credible account of a situation in a region previously unmentioned in human rights or news reports - an account that conforms to a pattern of abuses reported in other areas.

Country of origin information indicates that female genital mutilation (FGM)/female genital cutting (FGC) is widespread in a particular country, but more prevalent in the north. An interviewee claims that FGM/FGC is practiced by her ethnic group, which is from the south. Unless, after further research, you uncover specific reports indicating that the interviewee's southern ethnic group does not practice FGM/FGC, you should accept that COI corroborates the interviewee's claim.

### **3.3.3 Country Reports Directly Contradict or Refute the Claim**

When you rely upon COI directly to refute an interviewee's claim, you should use at least two reliable sources.

#### **Credibility**

If COI directly contradicts or refutes the interviewee's claim, the interviewee may not be credible.

#### ***Example***



The interviewee claimed to have been an active member of a political party since 2001. Multiple country reports establish that the political party was not formed until 2005. Because country reports directly contradict the interviewee's claim, her claim that she was an active member of that party is not credible.

### **Caveat**

The interviewee should always be given an opportunity to address this type of discrepancy since there may be a good explanation for the contradiction – for example, the party may have been formed in 2005 by the merger of several pre-existing parties, to one of which the interviewee belonged. (See RAIO Training module, *Credibility*, for additional guidance.)

### **Objective fear**

If country reports specifically refute an interviewee's claim that he or she is at risk of persecution, then the fear of future harm may not be reasonable, even if the facts the interviewee related are credible. For asylum adjudications you should explain in the decision that country of origin information does not support the interviewee's claim. In such cases, you should cite two or more reliable country of origin reports when explaining that the interviewee failed to establish a well-founded fear. For refugee adjudications, a specific citation is not required (unless the denial is based solely on COI), but it is encouraged when the report is at hand.

### ***Example***

An interviewee fears that, as a member of an opposition party, she is at risk of persecution. However, reliable COI indicates that opposition party members freely express their opinions and are a strong force in the government, and indicates that there have been no reports of threats, arrests, or harassment of opposition leaders for many years.

You must be careful to distinguish between country reports that *generally fail to support* a claim and country reports that *specifically refute* a claim.

Country of origin reports do **NOT** refute a claim when:

- Sources do not address the interviewee's situation
- Sources mention some groups at risk (not including the interviewee's) but do not state specifically that only those groups are at risk
- Sources are not relevant to the interviewee's situation in the time frame of the interviewee's past experiences

In *Galina v. INS*<sup>1</sup>, the Seventh Circuit was highly critical of the BIA for its overreliance and misapplication of COI, which did not specifically refute an asylum-seeker's claim.

### 3.3.4 COI neither Corroborates nor Refutes the Claim

The fact that COI mentions **some** events or human rights abuses directed against **some** groups, but does not mention **particular** events or human rights abuses directed against a **particular** group does not mean that the events or abuses did not occur. Sometimes COI focuses on major problems or particular groups in a country, to the exclusion of others. For example, a report may group together several small minorities by making statements such as "other minorities also experience difficulties." In such cases, it is difficult to determine which minorities are having difficulties.

The weight to be accorded a lack of corroboration in COI reporting depends on the particular case. In some cases, the lack of corroboration may not be given much weight, because the claim is very case-specific and the interviewee comes from a country in which it is difficult for human rights monitors to access information.

The lack of corroboration may be given greater weight if the interviewee fears persecution in a country in which reliable human rights information is easily accessed and the interviewee's claim is based on facts that an officer would reasonably expect to be reported, given the broad range of reporting available about a particular country.

A case may arise in which the interviewee alleges the occurrence of events that you would reasonably expect to be able to find in reports. In such cases, the lack of corroborating reports may cast doubt on the credibility of the claim. However, a lack of corroboration should generally not form the sole basis for a negative credibility determination.

### 3.3.5 Interviewee Presents Unfamiliar COI

You may be the first to hear about human rights abuses or other developments in a country. In many countries, reporters and human rights monitors may be impeded from gathering up-to-date information or may practice self-censorship. Human rights monitors, if there are any, may be paying attention to areas in which violations are more widespread.

#### *Examples*

In 1976, shortly after the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, six Australian journalists disappeared. Between 1976 and 1991 there was virtually no on-the-

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<sup>1</sup> *Galina v. INS*, 213 F.3d 955 (7th Cir. 2000).

ground reporting of the human rights situation in East Timor because it was deemed too dangerous for reporters or human rights monitors. What information was available came exclusively from refugees fleeing the country.

In Myanmar (Burma) there are many parts of the country where outsiders, including journalists and human rights monitors, are not allowed.

When an interviewee presents information that is unfamiliar to you, you should elicit as much detail as possible about the circumstances surrounding the events described and evaluate this for consistency with the general information that is available about the interviewee's country.

Testimony by an interviewee, even if it presents events unfamiliar to you, may still be found credible if the interviewee's testimony is detailed, consistent, and generally plausible in light of COI. If you have serious doubts about credibility based on lack of available country of origin information, you should discuss the issue with your supervisor, who may in turn contact the RAIO Research Unit for further assistance.

### **3.4 Citations**

In the asylum context, COI must be cited in the written decision *if it is relied upon in making the decision*. [[ASM Supplement - Citations](#)]. In the refugee context, COI must be cited if it is the sole basis for a denial. In the IO context, when adjudicating Requests for Review, COI should be cited to the extent possible, when explaining the basis of your decision.

## **4 SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

### **4.1 RAIO**

#### **The RAIO Research Unit**

The mission of the RAIO Research Unit is to provide officers at RAIO with credible and objective information on human rights and COI to support the timely adjudication of interviewees' claims. In addition, as the primary research body of DHS on human rights-related matters, the Research Unit assists other components of USCIS and DHS with research needs in related areas.

To address criticism and concerns that officers were relying on their own subjective concepts of COI in refugee-producing countries, or on reports motivated by foreign policy considerations, regulations were promulgated in 1990 that required the Director of International Affairs to maintain a human rights documentation center. Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 208.1(b), the Resource Information Center (RIC), now referred to as the Research Unit, was founded. The Research Unit gathers and makes available COI from a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental sources, including print and broadcast media, academic journals, human rights monitoring agencies, and refugee

advocacy groups. The Research Unit provides information independent of other government agencies to ensure that foreign policy considerations and other non-objective considerations do not play a role in the adjudication of asylum requests. The Research Unit also regularly liaises with COI units in other countries through country information sharing and participation in the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC). The Research Unit provides this information to RAIO staff via RAIO's physical library and the RAIO Virtual Library (see, *The RAIO Library*, immediately below) which includes full text-searchable electronic COI and reference documents and COI-related research databases.

The Research Unit's workload is divided into geographic regions. Currently, there are six geographic regions, each assigned a dedicated researcher. The Research Unit's researchers are responsible for the following:

- Collecting information about their region from a wide variety of sources
- Disseminating information to the field through training, papers, query responses, and other sources
- Helping to coordinate field trainings on COI and research techniques

The Research Unit serves as a resource to field office staff, providing technical assistance, information dissemination, and responses to questions where COI may be difficult to obtain. For questions involving legal issues, the Research Unit coordinates with the Law Library of Congress (LLOC) Foreign Law Specialists who provide foreign and legislative information services upon request. LLOC responses are posted on the RAIO VL and made available to the field.

In addition to compiling and disseminating research, the Research Unit also liaises with RAIO field offices to train staff on conducting research on country of origin and human rights information, and organizes speaker series of subject matter experts.

When specific COI is needed that cannot be found through the recommended search methods, the Research Unit can be contacted to conduct additional research. Queries for information can be submitted to the Research Unit through [RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov).

Specific procedures for contacting the Research Unit may vary among the Divisions, and you should follow the appropriate procedure for your specific office. In general, individual officers do not contact the Research Unit directly. In most instances, an officer should first bring any requests for assistance or information to his or her supervisor, who would then contact the Research Unit, if necessary. [\[RAD Supplement – RAIO Research Unit\]](#), [\[ASM Supplement – RAIO Research Unit\]](#)

## **The RAIO Library**

The RAIO Library, maintained by RAIO Library Services under the RAIO Performance Optimization branch, in coordination with RAIO Research, provides the following resources for RAIO adjudicators:

- The RAIO Virtual Library (RAIO VL) is a full text-searchable repository of reference documents and research databases available to RAIO staff worldwide.
- RAIO's physical library houses more than 100 serials and other publications. In addition to hard copies of many reports that are also commonly available on the Internet, the library contains older human rights reports (early 1990s and before) that are not posted on the Internet, academic journals that are accessed on the Internet, and book-length publications on various countries and topics. The RAIO Library is located at 20 Massachusetts Ave. NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC.

## **4.2 Public Sources**

Country of origin information is available from many public sources on the Internet. Generally, you will consult publicly available sources to obtain COI. You should use only public sources, as opposed to sensitive or classified information, when citing COI. Sources include:

- Government reports (e.g., U.S. Department of State, UK Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Danish Immigration Service, etc.)
- Intergovernmental reports (e.g., International Organization for Migration)
- Media reports
- Academic journals
- Non-governmental sources, such as:
  - Refugee advocacy groups
  - Human rights monitoring groups
  - Humanitarian aid agencies
  - Election monitoring groups

### **4.2.1 Multiple Sources**

All COI should be viewed critically and corroborated by multiple sources whenever possible. You should be aware of what a preponderance of the reporting reflects about a certain region or event before drawing conclusions from a single source.

### **4.2.2 Current and Historical Reports**

In addition to knowledge of current conditions in the countries that refugee interviewees are from, in many instances you will also need information regarding historical events in order to evaluate a claim properly. An interviewee may present evidence of past events that should be examined in light of both current and historical reporting.

When evaluating claims involving very recent events, you must conduct research using the most current information available, especially when conditions are deteriorating in a country. Conditions in a country of origin rarely improve markedly overnight, but they can deteriorate rapidly. However, if you are seeking to corroborate a specific historical incident, you may need to consult earlier sources -- those from the appropriate time period -- to find the information that you need. Overall, it is important to ensure that the research you conduct for interviews is both current and historically relevant to the issues presented.

### 4.3 Reputable Sources for Internet Research

Some websites specialize in collecting COI or human rights reports from a variety of sources. In addition to the RAIO VL, the sites are excellent places to start your research.

- **Refworld** is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) catalog of country of origin information.
- **ECOI** is the European Country of Origin Information Network, a collection of materials with a focus on information for asylum and refugee status determinations.

There are other country of origin research collections available online. Some are maintained by universities, like the University of Minnesota and the University of Connecticut, and others are privately managed. Whenever you use information from an online collection, you should use only materials that clearly identify the original author and/or publisher.

Other websites publish their own independently researched, primary source materials. These sources can often provide the most accurate accounts of conditions in a particular country.

- **U.S. Department of State (DOS)** publishes a variety of reports. Though mostly known for its annual Human Rights Reports, the DOS also releases annual reports on religious freedom, general country background information, fact sheets, visa reciprocity, and document availability. The DOS releases periodic topical reports and oversees the Humanitarian Information Unit (HIU) that drafts reports, maps, and statistics about humanitarian crises all over the world. [[IO Supplement - Reputable Sources for Internet Research](#)]
- **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** is a leading human rights organization with representatives worldwide. It regularly publishes reports on violations of international human rights.

- **Amnesty International (AI)** is another prominent human rights organization that releases annual and periodic reports with reliable COI.
- **International Crisis Group (ICG)** is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that reports on conflicts and country of origin information around the world.
- **IHS Jane's** is a subscriber-based intelligence service that produces original reports on foreign governments and NGOs. It is accessible through computers on the DHS network.

There are many other organizations that publish reports detailing conditions in foreign countries, or on specific regions or topics. Some have established international reputations for providing reliable information. All organizations and reports should be evaluated independently for reliability. Links to reliable foreign government Internet sources, such as the Danish Immigration Service and the UK Border Agency, can be found in the Internet Sources folder of the Research Unit section on the RAIO VL.

Newspapers, periodicals, and online publications can also serve as source material for COI. Most well-known news organizations have standards to ensure accuracy, and publish retractions when mistakes are made. However, you should distinguish between objective news reporting and opinion pieces, as discussed below in Assessing Source Reliability.

## **5 RESEARCH METHODS**

### **5.1 Assessing Source Reliability**

Any source of information is only as useful as it is reliable. A source of information that distorts facts to promote an agenda or routinely makes factual errors should not be relied upon. If a source generally bases its reporting on the facts as agreed upon by a majority of observers, it gains credibility.

Materials supplied by the RAIO Research Unit may be presumed reliable. All other sources should be evaluated carefully.

### **5.2 Evaluating the Reliability of Unfamiliar Sources**

There are many issues that should be considered to determine the reliability of an unfamiliar source.

#### **5.2.1 Agendas**

You should consider the agenda of a source when evaluating the facts reported by that source. That a source may have a perspective or bias does not mean that it should be assumed to be factually wrong.

### *Example*

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has an agenda to protect journalists, but it is this agenda that motivates the organization to compile a detailed list of journalists who have been attacked and imprisoned.

You should look behind the rhetoric and political objectives that influence an organization's effort in order to distinguish between what the organization's agenda is and whether it makes a good-faith effort to present facts in a credible manner.

## **5.2.2 Print and Broadcast Media**

COI obtained from media sources should be reviewed with caution, and you should be aware of the potential for distortion of truth by the media due to censorship, manipulation, and lack of expertise.

- Censorship and manipulation – The media in refugee-producing countries and some countries of first asylum that may be experiencing domestic problems, may be inhibited and cautious due to local censorship and to the local media's practice of portraying the government favorably. The squelching of local media coverage of human rights abuses is common in countries where such issues are prevalent. Similarly, manipulation of the media to further political agendas is common in many refugee-producing countries.
- Lack of expertise – It may be difficult to determine whether the underlying facts of a story are accurate because journalists are often unfamiliar with local law, human rights law, and/or the history or political details of certain conflicts. Journalists may fail to look beyond what was presented to them, and often do not have the time or resources to verify all of the information they receive. Therefore, they may misrepresent an issue out of ignorance.

## **5.2.3 Considerations for Unfamiliar Sources**

- Is the information generally consistent with other reporting, or can it be otherwise corroborated?
- Does the author employ a research methodology that can be judged? Are quotes cited in context of the entire document from which they are pulled? How close was the author in time and place to the events described?
- Is the tone of the report balanced or does it sound angry or vindictive? While it is important to consider the tone of the report, remember also to look past the rhetoric and try to determine the facts.
- Is there any information available about the group that prepared the report and does such information indicate any bias on the part of the group?



- If the source is an NGO, what is its philosophy?
- If the source is an intergovernmental or quasi-governmental organization, what is its mandate?
- If the source is a newspaper or magazine, what is its political bent?
- If the source is a government source, what is the government's record in the area of human and civil rights? Can its information be corroborated? Does freedom of the press exist? What, if any, foreign policy considerations may be at play that might influence the reporting on a particular country or region?
- If you are evaluating an unfamiliar website, consider the following:
  - What does the URL tell you about the site?
  - Who is the author/publisher of the site?
  - How current is the information on the site?
  - Does the bias of the author/publisher affect the usefulness of the information?
  - Are there other websites/sources that corroborate the information presented?

### **5.3 Research Tips**

There are many useful techniques to follow to make the country of origin research process as effective and efficient as possible.

#### **5.3.1 Become Familiar with the Types of Information Available**

Due to time constraints, it is imperative that you become familiar with the wide array of sources that are available and how these sources can be used most efficiently. It is also important that you know which sources to consult in different situations. You should know when it is best to consult the Internet, the Intranet, your office library, or the RAIO Research Unit. [\[ASM Supplement – Become Familiar with the Types of Information Available\]](#)

- Use electronic resources to the greatest extent possible because key terms can be searched easily.
- Use search engines to locate information on the Internet.
- Use the Research Unit's Internet Guide on the RAIO VL to determine which Internet sites are the most relevant to the type of research you are doing.
- Check the COI section of the RAIO VL for relevant postings on the country and topic being researched.

- Consult specialized databases available on the Internet. Information on these databases will not show up in the results from normal search engines. For example, Westlaw is a specialized database that can be searched for news and journal articles that often cannot be found easily on the Internet. There are other specialized databases that you have access to that may be useful, such as Open Source Center (OSC) and IHS Jane's.
- Other specialized databases are maintained by the Research Unit. These databases include the El Rescate Database covering El Salvador, the Guatemalan Military Database, and other country-specific databases.
- The COI section of the RAIO VL also contains the RAIO Research Unit's News Summary Bulletins and other articles and reports that are archived from the Internet. These articles and reports pertain specifically to conditions in the country of origin that may impact adjudications.

### **5.3.2 Focus Your Research**

You should keep in mind what specific COI is needed to enable you to make a decision on the case. You should not spend valuable time reading information that is unrelated to the interviewee's claim. This may best be accomplished by first searching key terms on the Internet or other electronic sources of COI. When searching within an electronic document, be sure to use the "find" (Ctrl+f) function to locate the relevant text quickly in the document. It may also be appropriate to consult the Research Unit when you have encountered too much information and cannot synthesize it for your particular needs. The Research Unit can provide assistance in analyzing and clarifying the information gathered.

### **5.4 Know When to Stop**

At minimum, you must have a general understanding of current conditions in the interviewee's country to make a reasoned decision. However, COI will rarely be the only basis for a decision. When a decision is not based primarily or solely on COI, you should conduct sufficient research to establish the general context of the interviewee's claim and to ensure that your knowledge of conditions in the country is up-to-date.

#### **5.4.1 Save and Reuse Your Previous Research Efforts**

Once you have conducted useful research, you should take a few minutes to organize and store your research so that it can be reused in the future if applicable. This can be done by bookmarking websites (if able), and/or by creating electronic country folders to store research; however, in relying on archived COI, you must update this resource periodically, as needed.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Knowing how to research COI and when to apply it is important in all stages of the interviewing and decision-making process. Familiarize yourself with the resources available to you. If the COI is from an unfamiliar online site, make sure to assess the source for reliability. Country of origin information provides you with objective evidence to assess an interviewee's application for an immigration benefit. The more background country information you have, the better prepared you will be to elicit testimony and to make decisions.

## **7 SUMMARY**

### **7.1 Importance of Country of Origin Information**

Knowledge of the legal standards of each immigration benefit which you are responsible for adjudicating must be complemented with knowledge of relevant COI in order to adjudicate fairly, in an informed, objective, and consistent manner.

Knowledge of COI is essential to your being able to:

- Elicit relevant information at an interview
- Evaluate whether an interviewee's claim has an objective, factual basis
- Assess the credibility of the interviewee
- Determine overall eligibility fairly

### **7.2 Role of Country of Origin Information in the Refugee/Asylum Interview Process**

It is imperative that you routinely consult COI, even when you believe you are familiar with the current situation in a country. Conditions in refugee-producing countries often are volatile and subject to frequent change.

It is the testimony provided by the interviewee at the interview that you must evaluate in light of COI in order to determine an interviewee's:

1. Credibility
2. Claim of past persecution or fear of future persecution
3. Involvement in acts of persecution
4. Possible firm resettlement in another country
5. Admissibility

### **7.3 Sources of Information**

- The RAIO Research Unit

- The RAIO Virtual Library and the RAIO physical library
- Online collections and databases
- Publicly available sources on the Internet

#### **7.4 Research Methods**

When conducting country of origin research, it is important to consult a variety of sources to gain as comprehensive an understanding of the country as possible. You should be aware of what a preponderance of the reporting says about a certain area before drawing conclusions about conditions in that area from a single source.

1. Consider the agenda, mandate, or political leaning of a source.
2. Can information provided by a source be corroborated by other reputable sources?
3. If using a media source, consider the political bent (pro-government, opposition), the possibility for manipulation, and the expertise of the reporter.
4. If you are evaluating an unfamiliar website, consider the following:
  - What does the URL tell you about the site?
  - Who is the author/publisher of the site?
  - How current is the information on the site?
  - Does the bias of the author/publisher affect the usefulness of the information?
  - Are there other websites/sources that corroborate the information presented?

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

### Practical Exercise # 1

- **Title**: Country of Origin Research for Refugee Processing
- **Student Materials**: Computer Lab with Internet and Intranet Access

doing targeted country of origin research in preparation for upcoming circuit ride

Please research the following on the country of nationality that you will be interviewing for your upcoming circuit ride:

- Thailand Circuit Ride:
- Burmese interviewees, mostly ethnic Karen and Karenni and Burmese Muslims
- Malaysia Circuit Ride:
- Burmese interviewees, mostly ethnic Chin
- Nepal Circuit Ride:
- Bhutanese interviewees of Nepali ethnicity
- Turkey and Jordan Circuit Ride:
- Iraqi interviewees of Christian, Shia Muslim, and Sunni Muslim religions, employees or associates of USG and its allies

Among the members of your circuit ride group, divide up the following topics for research and 5 – 10 minute presentation to the class:

1. What kinds of individuals have been persecuted in the interviewee's country of origin?
2. On what grounds have they been persecuted in the country of origin?
3. What is the ethnic breakdown in the country of origin?
4. What is the religious breakdown in the country of origin?
5. Identify 2 significant events that have taken place in the country of origin within the past 2 decades (for example: military campaigns, elections, protests, intrastate conflicts, etc.).
6. What kinds of human rights violations and abuses take place against the

- interviewee population in their country of origin?
7. Who are the persecutors in the country of origin?
  8. What countries border the country of origin?
  9. What potential “terrorist organizations” (as defined in INA 212(a)(3)(B)(vi)) exist in the country of origin or among the specific refugee population to be interviewed?
  10. What is the ability of the government to protect refugee interviewee in country of origin/persecution?
  11. Obtain geography/Maps of country of origin that clarify where abuses or groups at risk are located
  12. Collect Information on characteristics particular to the ethnic or religious group, such as location, language, dress, history
  13. Collect information on potential “persecutors” in the country of origin •
- Conduct research on the status of these interviewees in the country you will be interviewing them in.

**Practical Exercise #2**

There are no student materials for Practical Exercise #2.

**Practical Exercise #3**

There are no student materials for Practical Exercise #3.

**Practical Exercise #4**

- **Title:** Case Study
- **Student Materials:** Computer Lab with Internet and Intranet Access

Fact pattern:

Interviewee states that she was a math teacher at a rural school in Colombia. Although she has never been especially involved in trade union activities, her close friend – a teacher at the same school – was. Her friend was kidnapped and killed recently by one of the two militant groups fighting in her area, the FARC or the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia. She is afraid that she will be similarly targeted.

Conducting a quick 10-minute internet search using keywords such as “Colombia” “trade union” “kidnapping” “FARC” and “United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia” you were able to find COI.

How would you utilize this information in the asylum interview to elicit information material to this interviewee’s claim?

1. List lines of inquiry that you would use in the interview.
2. Suppose that, when you asked the interviewee which group she believes kidnapped her friend and colleague, she replied that (based on what she heard) she believes that it was a left-wing, communist group known as the “United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia”. What would be your initial reaction to this response in terms of evaluating interviewee’s credibility? What follow-up questions would you need to ask to determine whether your initial reaction was appropriate? •

### **Practical Exercise #5**

After you read [Galina v. INS](#), 213 F.3d 955 (7th Cir. 2000), consider what kind of COI reports would have properly supported the BIA’s decision.

**OTHER MATERIALS**

There are no Other Materials for this module.



**SUPPLEMENT A – REFUGEE AFFAIRS DIVISION**

The following information is specific to the Refugee Affairs Division. Information in each text box contains division-specific procedures and guidelines related to the section from the Training Module referenced in the subheading of the supplement text box.

**REQUIRED READING**

None

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

None

**SUPPLEMENTS**

**RAD Supplement – 1 Introduction**

The importance of country of origin information is emphasized in the INA at section 207(f).

**INA § 207: Annual admission of refugees and admission of emergency situation refugees.**

(f) Training

(1) The Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall provide all United States officials adjudicating refugee cases under this section with the same training as that provided to officers adjudicating asylum cases under section 208.

(2) Such training shall include country-specific conditions, instruction on the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion, instruction on methods of religious persecution practiced in foreign countries, and applicable distinctions within a country between the nature of and treatment of various religious practices and believers.

**RAD Supplement – 3.1 Pre-Interview Preparation**

**Circuit Ride and Interview Preparation**

It is imperative that you routinely conduct country of origin research in preparation for every circuit ride. You may be interviewing interviewees of the same nationality, or interviewees of numerous nationalities at a particular refugee processing location. It is your responsibility to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the country or countries of origin. Having a manageable collection of country reports available for reference will be useful while on circuit ride.

To gather the most useful collection of country reports for a circuit ride, select reports that provide information on the conditions in the interviewee's country of origin around the time of the interviewee's flight from his or her country as well as information on current conditions in the interviewee's country of origin. When refugee interviewee documentation can be accessed in the WRAPS database in advance of a circuit ride, you may ascertain the nature of the refugee claims presented for interview and more effectively focus your research on the most relevant country of origin information. You should learn as much as possible about ethnic groups, religions, political organizations, elections, demonstrations, attacks, locations, timing of events, etc. that are presented in the claims of the refugee interviewees to focus country of origin research prior to the circuit ride.

When the nature of the refugee claims is not known in advance, it is best to bring along reports that are as comprehensive as possible and address the situation of groups at risk in a country. A glossary of political parties and a timeline of events for countries is often a useful reference to have on hand.

**RAD Supplement – 3.2 Eliciting Testimony at the Interview**

Generally, in refugee processing situations, you are interviewing many interviewees from the same country of origin. Often interviewees at a given processing location may have similar types of refugee claims either because they fled the same area within their home country or because they face similar situations of danger. In such situations, draw on your knowledge of COI gained during pre-departure preparation to evaluate these claims, rather than researching each individual case. However, if you encounter a claim that is unfamiliar or unusual in light of known COI, then additional research will likely be necessary.

**RAD Supplement – 4.1 RAIO Research Unit****Country of Origin Research in Washington, DC**

You will be conducting most of your country of origin research while in Washington, DC at the Refugee Affairs Division office. While in Washington, DC, you will be able to access WRAPS records of refugee interviewees scheduled for an upcoming circuit ride. You should ascertain the nature of the persecution claims from the WRAPS database and focus your research on the ethnic groups, religious groups, and political groups that are presented in the claims. Previously adjudicated cases from certain regions and populations may also help you anticipate the types of claims and issues you might encounter. While knowledge of current conditions in a country is always helpful in evaluating refugee claims, country of origin research should also focus on the time frame of the events that caused interviewees to flee when they did.

Maps, glossaries, timelines of events, and comprehensive reports are ideal country of origin resources to take with you on a refugee detail. Searching the Internet is the most common method for you to access COI. However, many resources are not accessible online. The RAIO Knowledge Management Center contains hardcopy reports and lengthier historic and background publications that may be useful.

RAD has also recently developed Adjudicative Aids for the populations most commonly encountered. The adjudicative aids serve as a great starting point for conducting research because they identify the key issues, red flags, and historical events associated with each population. Research on the issues highlighted in the adjudicative aids will help you elicit testimony and assess credibility because you will have more objective knowledge to weigh against the claims of the interviewee.

You will receive a Pre-Departure Training (PDT) prior to each circuit ride. A portion of the PDT addresses general information about the populations that will be interviewed and the issues that often arise during interviews (e.g. grounds of inadmissibility that seem to be common, armed groups known to be associated with a certain population, etc.).

The PDTs often provide country of origin material to the interviewers, either electronically on CDs or as hard copies. However, the PDT is not meant to replace individual research. Dedicate individual time to conduct research. You may discover that the issues are numerous and complex and some sources like human rights reports may take a significant amount of time to review. The COI sources discussed and distributed during PDT should also be available on the Refugee L:\ drive.

### **Country of Origin Research while on Detail**

Generally speaking, there will be limited time and opportunity to conduct country of origin research while overseas. It is good practice to take country reports with you to reference while on detail. Most worksites have very limited access to the Internet, and often the only opportunity to do Internet research while on a refugee detail will be in the hotel or at a nearby Internet café. At times, however, a novel

## Supplement A

### Refugee Affairs Division

### Researching and Using Country of Origin Information in RAIO Adjudications

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issue will arise in a case that will require extra research. All such cases should be discussed with one's team leader and each issue may be handled in a variety of ways: you could be permitted time to do the necessary research; the Team Leader could do the research for the case since he or she generally has more readily available access to the Internet; a query could be sent to the appropriate desk officer at RAD HQ; the Desk Officer could in turn pass these requests on to other members of the RAD Policy and Regional Operations (PRO) Branch, to the RAIO Research Unit, or to outside subject matter experts – for example, DoD – and so on.

As throughout the course of a trip you perform more interviews with the same or similar populations, certain issues may come up repeatedly or you may become aware of particular gaps in your knowledge about country-specific issues that surface regularly in testimony. Thus, you may benefit from conducting additional research on particular issues at intervals throughout the course of a trip, if time permits.

**SUPPLEMENT B – ASYLUM DIVISION**

The following information is specific to the Asylum Division. Information in each text box contains division-specific procedures and guidelines related to the section from the Training Module referenced in the subheading of the supplement text box.

**REQUIRED READING**

None

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

None

**SUPPLEMENTS**

**ASM Supplement – 1 Introduction**

8 C.F.R. §208.1(b):

The Director of International Affairs shall also, in cooperation with the Department of State and other appropriate sources, compile and disseminate to asylum officers information concerning the persecution of persons in other countries on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, torture of persons in other countries, and other information relevant to asylum determinations, and shall maintain a documentation center with information on human rights conditions.

**ASM Supplement – 3.1 Pre-Interview Preparation**

**When conducting an interview in a USCIS office with ready-access to Intranet and Internet sources**

In preparation for conducting an asylum interview you should review the general government structure, basic political situation, and human rights conditions in the country from which the interviewee fled, or his or her country of last habitual residence. This can be done in a reasonable amount of time by referring to resources available on your desktop computer through the Intranet and the Internet,

as well as an in-house library. Materials gathered and prepared by the RAIO Research Unit, available through the Intranet and in each office's library, can assist in providing the necessary background information. You should develop and maintain an in-depth familiarity with the wide variety of sources so that you can consult the most relevant source in the short time available for pre-interview research.

You should keep in mind that there are some useful sources that may be found only in the local office library. Maintaining a familiarity with the contents of the local office library can enhance your range of useful sources.

If you are unfamiliar with a group to which the interviewee belongs, a word search on the Internet using a reliable search engine, such as Google, or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee's Refworld, or of Intranet sources, such as the RAIO Virtual Library (RAIO VL), may provide basic information that will enable you to ask informed questions at the interview. Bear in mind, however, that information found on the Internet should be evaluated carefully for reliability. Information found on the Internet or via other electronic sources, such as the Intranet or databases, may be out-of-date. In addition, neither the Internet nor other electronic resources can contain information about every group in the world. The fact that a group is not found in the sources consulted does not mean that the group does not exist.

When conducting off-site interviews:

Prior to any circuit ride, you should review files or anticipated claims, when possible, to determine whether they contain claims involving a country or group with which you are unfamiliar. Because many off-site interview locations (such as detention facilities) will not be conducive to conducting country of origin research, you should prepare for these interviews while still in the Asylum Office, where information is accessible. It may be useful to conduct a search of electronic sources for events or groups relating to the claims, print the pertinent pages, and bring them along for the off-site interview. Copies of the annual reports on specific countries done by various human rights and government organizations can be accessed electronically and printed to take to an off-site interview.

### **[ASM Supplement – 3.4 Citations](#)**

When you rely upon COI directly to refute an interviewee's claim, you must cite at least two reliable sources.

### **One-Year filing Deadline**

Regardless of the filing date of an application, Asylum Officers are to give all applicants an asylum interview. This includes pre-interview familiarization with general country conditions and post-interview research of specific country conditions relevant to the applicant's situation, where applicable. See also Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual (AAPM), Section III.P.2. b., November 2007.

When an applicant has established an exception to the one-year filing deadline, Asylum Officers must include a brief analysis of the one-year filing deadline issue in the assessment to grant or refer. The analysis should include the changed and/or extraordinary circumstances established and a finding that the applicant filed within a reasonable time given the circumstances. If the exception(s) established are based on country conditions, country reports must be cited.

The AAPM further instructs that other than for specified exceptions, "an assessment to refer based on the one-year filing deadline must reflect that the officer reviewed country conditions to confirm that there has been no change that materially affects the applicant's eligibility for asylum. When country conditions are relevant to the applicant's asylum eligibility, the assessment must contain at least two country conditions citations to support a finding that the applicant has not established an exception based on changed circumstances. The time period covered by the citations is determined on a case-by-case basis, but generally must cover the period beginning 24 months preceding the filing date, and ending on the date of the decision. It is preferable that the two citations be from different sources; however they may be from the same issuing organization or agency if another source cannot be found. These guidelines have been developed as a minimum safeguard to document that, where required, country conditions have been examined for changed circumstances before an application is referred. Certain cases may require a broader review of country conditions or citations to more than two sources." See AAPM Section III. P.2.c.ii.b, Country Conditions Citations.

### **Previous Denial of Asylum by EOIR**

In cases involving a previous denial of asylum by EOIR, where the established changed circumstances relate to country conditions, the Asylum Officer must cite to country conditions reports to support the finding. See AAPM, Section III.P.3.f.i.

See Also, Memorandum dated January 4, 2002: *Procedures for Implementing the One-Year Filing Deadline and Processing Cases Previously Denied by EOIR*, issued by Joe Langlois, Director, Asylum Division.

b. Summarize.

It is not necessary to quote extensively from country of origin reports. A summary

of the relevant information relied upon may suffice.

*Example*

Reliable reports indicate that the Egyptian government arrested, detained, and abused Internet bloggers. See: United States Department of State (U.S. DOS). 11 Mar 2008. "Egypt: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2007," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100594.htm>, (Accessed 14 Mar 2008).

Note: When using sources in electronic form, where cutting and pasting is available it may be quicker to pick an appropriate selection and quote it directly.

**Be accurate and complete**

The summary must accurately reflect the source quoted. Never use material selectively, take material out of context, distort the overall message of the source, or claim that the source says something that it does not say.

*Example*

A State Department report states that religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution of country X. The report further states that in practice, violence against Jehovah's Witnesses is common and that the government does not punish perpetrators of such violence. It would be incorrect to make the following statements:

"According to the State Department, religious freedom is guaranteed under the laws of X. [cite]; therefore, it is not reasonable for the interviewee to fear she will be persecuted because she is a Jehovah's Witness."

**Ensure that information is current or chronologically-relevant**

Information relied upon should be current or chronologically-relevant to the events relayed by the interviewee. When citing to an annual human rights report, refer to the latest available edition, unless an earlier version is needed to corroborate past persecution or a specific historical incident.

**ASM Supplement – 5.3.1 Become Familiar with the Types of Information Available**

- Consult your office's library for hard copy reports when information is needed to verify events that occurred prior to the mid-1990s, as these reports are often



not archived on the Internet.

- Consult the RAIO Research Unit, when you are unable to find information on the Internet or in your local library and the information is necessary to arrive at a decision on a case.

**ASM Supplement - 4.1 RAIO Research Unit**

The following guidance on contacting the Research Unit is taken from The Asylum Affirmative Procedures Manual, Section II. M. 2, The Country of Origin (COI) Research Section, (p. 38), Revised November 2007:

AOs should discuss with their SAOs the submission of queries to the COI Research Section, as case processing may be delayed in order to complete the research. In addition, AOs should copy their QA/Ts on the submission of queries to the COI Research Section so that QA/Ts are aware of research needs and questions in the office. Queries are best sent by email to [RAIOresearch@dhs.uscis.gov](mailto:RAIOresearch@dhs.uscis.gov). The Asylum Office is responsible for developing a system to distribute to staff COI queries and responses. In addition, the COI Research Section will publish all query responses on the AVL. Access to certain query responses may be limited to certain user groups if the query response contains sensitive information.

**SUPPLEMENT C – INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS DIVISION**

The following information is specific to the International Operations Division. Information in each text box contains division-specific procedures and guidelines related to the section from the Training Module referenced in the subheading of the supplement text box.

**REQUIRED READING**

None

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

None

**SUPPLEMENTS**

**IO Supplement – 4.4 Reputable Sources for Internet Research**

When adjudicating intercountry adoptions, you should become familiar with the U.S. Department of State’s intercountry adoption site located at [adoption.state.gov](http://adoption.state.gov). Managed by the Office of Children’s Issues (CI) as part of the Bureau of Consular affairs at the Department of State, the website provides up-to-date information about a country’s adoption process, eligibility requirements, adoption statistics, alerts and warnings and more. The USCIS adoption website also contains country updates related to petition processing in certain countries – see [www.uscis.gov/adoption](http://www.uscis.gov/adoption) and select the Country Information tab.

For intercountry adoptions and other IO form types where applicants are required to submit civil documents in support of their applications, the Department of State Reciprocity Tables found [here](#) are very useful. Each country specific page provides detailed information about the government-recognized and authorized entities or agencies within that country for obtaining civic documents such as birth, marriage, divorce certificates, adoption decrees, police, or prison records. The information details the availability of each document, and how and where it can be obtained in that particular country.