

Text of Letter from UKBA to the Zimbabwe Vigil

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 30 July 2011 21:26 - Last Updated Saturday, 30 July 2011 21:26

18th July 2011 Thank you for your letter of 29th June about the comments regarding Zimbabwe Vigil which appeared in a decision letter in an individual case of a Zimbabwean asylum seeker.

I apologise at the outset for the offence this has understandably given. We have been in contact with Law to establish further details, but unfortunately the individual asylum seeker concerned is unwilling to provide us with information that would enable us to identify the case and investigate how or why the case owner concerned came to use the quote from www.nehandaradio.com

. I must therefore respond in general terms.

Decision makers are required to assess the country information as objectively as possible and to be aware of as much information from as many sources as possible in order to conduct fair, efficient and well-informed decisions. The UK Border Agency's Country of Origin Information (COI) Service monitors the human rights situation in all the countries that generate asylum seekers to the UK, including Zimbabwe. It provides accurate, relevant, balanced, impartial and up-to-date information on asylum seekers' countries of origin, for use by UK Border Agency officials involved in the asylum determination process.

The COI material produced by COI Service is compiled from a wide range of external information sources including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), human rights organisations, inter-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, news media and Foreign and Commonwealth Office. COI Reports, produced on the top 20 countries that generate asylum seekers and published on the UK Border Agency website, are updated regularly and significant changes in country conditions are communicated to decision makers as required. UK Border Agency officials also have access to an information request service, which provides responses to specific country-based enquiries.

I can confirm that the published and available country information produced by COI Service does not make reference to the quote from www.nehandaradio.com .

We already have instructions that set out what case owners should do if they are unable to find relevant case-specific information in existing COI products: they are required to consult colleagues locally and, if the information is still not available, then contact COI Service, which will research the matter.

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We also provide guidance on researching COI. Case owners receive substantial training on the information and skills needed to make well-reasoned decisions supported by subjective evidence and objective information. As part of the foundation training course case owners are advised on types of objective evidence, reliability, scope and accuracy of sources. Case owners are specifically advised that if they are still in need of further information, they can conduct individual research but they must carefully analyse the sources used and check them with a Senior Caseworker (SCW) and / or COI Service before use.

Case owners also have online access to guidance entitled 'Research methods of key COI sources' which provides further guidance on core sources used by COI Service when compiling their products. We do however recognise the importance of consistent research and will continually strive to ensure that case owners have clear guidance to follow to ensure this. We have already issued a desk note that includes information on researching and referencing COI and will ensure we further communicate existing guidance on the list of sources that should be referred to.

Yours faithfully

Phil Douglas
Director, Appeals and Removals