

Country Specialist Job Description

Country Specialists are volunteer leaders commissioned to serve as AIUSA's country experts and strategists. The approximately 130 members are organized into coordination groups ("cogroups"), which are responsible for anywhere from one to a dozen countries. Country Specialist positions are based in the United States and infrequently involve travel to the country on which they work. Country Specialists reside throughout the United States and communicate with AIUSA staff and volunteers primarily via telephone, written correspondence and electronic mail, and periodically in person. Note that these positions are unpaid volunteer positions and only AI related expenses are reimbursed.

Country Specialists are selected on the basis of a combination of country expertise and experience, Amnesty International knowledge and human rights activist experience and the organization's needs in that area. Candidates who have lived in the country and speak the language are preferred. In most cases, a minimum of a two-year commitment is requested. Though it is difficult to estimate the time commitment required of volunteers, it is estimated that the position averages ten hours per week. In the interest of avoiding any perception of political bias, Country Specialists may not be assigned to their country of birth, citizenship or naturalization.

A Country Specialist generally serves as a resource person for any of AIUSA's initiatives to improve human rights in the relevant country and in other ways makes AI's concerns about human rights violations in the relevant country known to those able to bring pressure to bear on the government concerned. The responsibilities of individual Country Specialists will differ; that is, not every Country Specialist is expected to perform all of the duties listed below. The goal is for every Country or Regional Coordination Group ("cogroup") to have the capacity, among its members, to perform all of the following tasks.

Serving as AIUSA's primary monitor and expert on the relevant country: Country Specialists stay current on AI concerns in their countries and on AI's mission or other policies affecting work on those countries. They also monitor the general and specialist press and on-line or paper sources and consult other specialists to maintain a thorough and current understanding of events in the countries they cover. They maintain a basic information storage and retrieval system and adhere to all guidelines for the responsible handling of information.

✓ **Maintaining regular contact with relevant governmental officials:** Country Specialists communicate routinely with the relevant desk officers for their countries at the Department of State (DOS) and with US embassies abroad. They also attempt to maintain a dialogue with the foreign embassies of the countries that they cover. They provide critiques of the DOS annual human rights report entries. Some Country Specialists may, on occasion, draft relevant AIUSA reports on arms transfers. Where appropriate, Country Specialists are also encouraged to contact World Bank or other relevant officials, in addition to their core governmental contacts previously mentioned.

✓ **Working with asylum-seekers and refugees from the relevant country:** Country Specialists work in conjunction with the AI Refugee Program to assist refugees and asylum-seekers from the relevant country. They should be familiar with AIUSA's procedures for relief and for referrals to torture treatment centers or for other medical assistance. Periodically, AIUSA's Refugee Program contacts Country Specialists for the most updated information on a particular country. Country Specialists may also cooperate with non-AI groups working on refugee issues and may monitor the refugee situation in the US at the request of the International Secretariat (IS). Some Country Specialists may be called on to provide testimony in political asylum hearings.

✓ **Collaborating with AIUSA's Communications Department:** Given a reasonable timeframe, Country Specialists respond to media queries on their countries of expertise that come directly to their attention or are referred to them by the staff. They are also encouraged to take a proactive media approach and draft or edit articles, op-eds, or letters to the editor or otherwise initiate media coverage on their countries.

✓ **Participating in the direct response (fundraising letters) copy review process in a timely manner:** Country Specialists periodically review copy of direct mail material to ensure that country information is accurate, and, when necessary, recommend revised wording. Country Specialists may propose cases that would be suitable for a direct mail piece and may be asked to help draft and/or review copy on that case.

✓ **Serving as a resource and adviser on country strategy to other programs in AIUSA.**

- ✓ **Serving as a link to, or collaborating with, their counterparts in other AI sections, and allied NGOs, country specialists, and relevant émigré communities in the US.**

Serving as AIUSA’s link to the relevant sub-regional team at the International Secretariat (IS) in London: Country Specialists confer with researchers and campaigners covering their country for the IS, exchanging information, developing strategies, and on occasion assisting them in compilation of research documentation and actions. Country Specialists serve as a liaison between members and staff working on the relevant country and the sub-regional team that covers it. Country Specialists also provide feedback to the IS on relevant documents and actions.

Developing country strategies: Country Specialists participate with other section actors in an annual country review meeting (CRM) and internationally in a bi-annual strategy development process. Country Specialists conduct research to determine which target sectors within the US (governmental and non-governmental) could be most effectively mobilized to improve the human rights situation in the relevant country, research/develop country-specific information and action for use by those target sectors, and build working relationships with them.

Overseeing implementation of country strategy: Country Specialists work with members and staff to develop and support membership action on their country, consistent with the country strategy. Country Specialists assist in carrying out relevant actions originating in the IS or within AIUSA, including section-wide campaigns, more limited country action programs, or actions solely for a particular network or publication, such as the Legal Support Network.

- ✓ **Supporting and monitoring group country work (Action Files, Regional Action Network (RAN) actions, campaigns):** Country Specialists organize action by AIUSA members and groups on AI’s objectives in their target countries. This includes maintaining regular contact with and providing assistance to groups handling cases from their relevant country. In this role, Country Specialists may compile newsletters, send periodic memos, telephone, fax or email groups in order to provide background information, action suggestions, and general advice. Evaluating group work on Action Files, RAN actions, and campaigns is a critical part of Country Specialist work. Annual Action File report forms are to be reviewed carefully, and groups should be asked to fill in any gaps or provide clarification. If groups do not submit these reports, they should be telephoned and encouraged to do so. It is important to identify weak and strong groups, so weak groups can be strengthened or arrangements can be made for case sharing or removal, if necessary.

- ✓ **Collaborating with Government Relations staff to develop and implement AIUSA’s approach to the US Government:** Country Specialists and Advocacy Directors collaborate on all aspects of the DC strategy for a given country. They may be asked to prepare briefings and present testimony before Congress.

- ✓ **Collaborating with other AIUSA programs and networks in the implementation of country strategies:** These include the Legal Support Network (LSN), OUTfront, the Health Professionals Network (HPN), the Human Rights Educators (HRE) Network, etc.

Adhering to the quarterly budget reporting cycle: Country Specialists are responsible for adhering to the “Guidelines for Coordination Group Finances/Accounts.”

Participating in self-assessment: Each Country Coordination Group periodically evaluates its strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness, and reports to the Director of the Country Specialist Program on its needs, if any, for additional resources, training or other support.