
Tips for Initial Client Meetings, Declarations and Witness Statements

(for Attorneys and Accredited Representatives)

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What is the purpose of the initial client meeting?

- Become acquainted with your client (and family)
- Establish attorney-client relationship, sign an agreement, discuss the representation
- Set expectations for case process and attorney-client relationship
- Begin building trust and rapport with your client
- Begin gathering facts for your client's case

Scheduling the initial meeting with your client

- Schedule as soon as possible
- Schedule adequate time to begin case discussion
- Coordinate an interpreter

Working with an interpreter

- Consider using a non-family member interpreter
- Confirm language compatibility with client at beginning of meeting (or before)
- Set expectations with the interpreter
- **PAUSE!** - Speak 2 or 3 sentences and then let interpreter translate

How to set expectations with your client

- Provide overview of your role as attorney or accredited representative
- Provide overview of case steps and timeline
- Provide overview of client's involvement in providing case details and evidence
- Be confident in your counsel abilities!

What is the purpose of the asylum declaration?

- Your client's opportunity to tell their story
- An emotional account of the facts
- Helps to identify appropriate evidence for case
- Provides overview for Asylum Officer of what to expect during interview

What details your client should include in the declaration

- Background details
- All relevant details to asylum claim
- Any recent events to your client's story since departure from Afghanistan (e.g., threats, harm to family, etc.)
- Request to grant asylum application

How to draft the declaration

- Sit with your client and ask questions about their story
- Type your client's responses verbatim
- Ask follow-up questions for more details
- Rearrange details to create a cohesive statement
- Review statement with your client before they sign

What questions to ask your client to draft the declaration

- Questions about their background
- Questions about their fear of returning to Afghanistan
- Questions about things that could bar your client from asylum
- Questions about how their political and/or religious beliefs differ from the Taliban
- Details, details, details!
 - AVOID pinning your client to dates or details they won't recall during the interview

Example of description of political/religious practices

“The Taliban sees us as a separate religion. That is how they justify killing us. They say that we are infidels if we helped the U.S. in any way, or have connections to people who helped the United States. If I returned to Afghanistan, and if I was allowed to leave the Kabul Airport, I’d have to follow the Taliban’s religious rules I don’t believe in. For example, I don’t always wear a hijab while living in the U.S. If I returned to Afghanistan and walked down the street like this, I would be a target for the Taliban, because women are now required to wear a full burqa. I would also be required to always be accompanied by a male family member while traveling outside my home. I want to finish my university degree, but I could not do that in Afghanistan. The Taliban does not let you practice any different interpretation of Islam.”

DO NOT COPY! The declaration is unique to your client’s facts.

Tips to remember while drafting the declaration

- The declaration should be written in your client's voice
 - Express your client's fear and emotions
- Detailed, but succinct
- All facts should be consistent with the I-589 form
- Be patient!

What is the purpose of a witness statement?

- Corroborate your client's testimony
- Provide supplemental information
- Reaffirm your client's credibility

When should I include a witness statement?

- When there is available testimony from a credible witness that supports your client's case
- When there are concerns with details of your client's case that need additional explanation
- When the additional testimony does not raise additional questions or concerns
- Discuss potential witnesses and statements with your client

Details to include in the witness statement

- The relationship between your client and the witness
- How the witness obtained the knowledge of their testimony
- The details related to your client's asylum claim (e.g., threats, beatings, arrests, imprisonments, etc.)
- Be specific!

Additional Free Resources

VECINA's Teachable Course on Afghan Affirmative Asylum

- Recent Asylum Interview Questions – <https://vecina.teachable.com/p/afghan-asylum>

Questions?

This recording and the slides will be made available at the following link:

<https://vecina.org/afghan-interview-prep/>