
OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



June 2013

The Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
The Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA
United Kingdom

Protective Asylum for Endangered Afghan Host Nation Linguists

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), the International Federation of Translators (FIT), the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI), and Red T, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings, we urge you to grant asylum to all Afghan host nation linguists who served the British Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

The undersigned, representing over 80,000 translators and interpreters worldwide, applaud your government for its recent commitment to resettle up to 600 of our Afghan colleagues. However, we are extremely concerned about the fate of the remaining interpreters, who are excluded under the current scheme due to its narrow and arbitrary parameters.

These parameters, among them employment dates and degrees of danger, ignore the fact that the Taliban view all linguists who assisted foreign troops as traitors. As has been widely documented in the British and international media, they have become high-priority targets and are under growing threat as the security situation steadily deteriorates. According to figures released by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Afghanistan, there was a 46 percent increase in targeted killings in the first quarter of 2013 versus the previous year. As of this April, at least 20 interpreters allied with the British military had been killed in action, five others while off duty, and dozens more injured.

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Your government has repeatedly acknowledged the contribution of interpreters, who provided crucial linguistic and cultural services without which the British troops would have been unable to engage with local populations. In recognition of their role and continued risk they face, both Lord Ashdown, former Liberal Democrat leader, and General Sir Mike Jackson, former Chief of General Staff, have stated that Britain has a “moral obligation” to grant them asylum. Furthermore, after the latest proposals were unveiled, David Davis, former Conservative Foreign Minister, called on your government to offer entry to all linguists and not just to a select group.

We strongly second this call. The perils for the interpreters left behind are readily apparent. The value of their service to British troops is indisputable. As an international community of language professionals, we hope that you will give them a safe haven in the UK.

Sincerely,

Linda Fitchett
President, AIIC

Marion Boers
President, FIT

Aurora Humarán
President, IAPTI

Maya Hess
President, Red T

Cc:
The Rt. Hon. Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of Defence