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# OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS  
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



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September 2014

The Honorable Mark Rutte  
Prime Minister, Minister of General Affairs  
Ministerie van Algemene Zaken  
Binnenhof 19  
Postbus 20001  
2500 EA Den Haag  
Netherlands

## **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 U.S.-based non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings, we urge you to protect all local Afghan interpreters who served the Dutch Armed Forces by granting them asylum in the Netherlands.

The undersigned, representing over 80,000 translators and interpreters worldwide, are deeply concerned about the fate of our colleagues following the Dutch authorities' initial denial of asylum to Afghan interpreter Abdul Ghafoor Ahmadzai, who worked for the Dutch military. Although we were told that his case is being revisited, which is a promising development, we are troubled by the Dutch Immigration Service's statement that "there are no legal or moral reasons why he should be allowed to stay."

While we cannot speak to your country's legal reality, from a moral perspective we consider the initial decision on the case to be wrong, especially since, in a tragic twist of fate, Ahmadzai's brother was mistaken for Ahmadzai and murdered. According to a 2009 UNHCR estimate, there was a period in which one interpreter was killed every 36 hours, and since the troops were withdrawn, there has been a documented increase in targeted attacks on both the interpreters and

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their families. We thus disagree with Justice Minister Fred Teeven's recent comment that having been employed as an interpreter by the Dutch military is not sufficient grounds to be given protective residency in the Netherlands.

Between 2006 and 2010, there were approximately 120 local interpreters working for the Dutch troops in Uruzgan. By connecting them with local populations, these linguists were the backbone of your missions. Yet, due to this collaboration, they are seen as traitors by some factions in their own country. We understand the Dutch government has not implemented a special asylum policy for interpreters and that cases are judged individually. We nevertheless urge the Dutch authorities to view any pending or future asylum applications in the light of the gravity of the situation for all local interpreters. Giving asylum to linguists now will not only save lives but is imperative for the success of future engagements in conflict zones.

As an international community of language professionals, we thank you in advance for helping our colleagues at risk.

Sincerely,

Linda Fitchett  
President, AIIC

Henry Liu  
President, FIT

Aurora Humarán  
President, IAPTI

Maya Hess  
President, Red T

Cc:

State Secretary of Security and Justice and Minister for Migration The Hon. Fred Teeven  
Minister of Security and Justice The Hon. Ivo Opstelten  
Minister of Defense The Hon. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert  
Minister of Foreign Affairs The Hon. Frans Timmermans

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