
OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



February 2013

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Overly Broad “Terrorism Bars” Put the Lives of Host-Nation Linguists at Risk

Dear Madam Secretary:

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 would like to bring to your attention the fact that many Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applications of U.S.-affiliated Afghan and Iraqi linguists are stalled indefinitely or wrongly rejected on the grounds of terrorism-related inadmissibility.

In response to overly broad revisions to the definition of “terrorist activity” and “terrorist organization,” the U.S. Congress has amended the immigration law to expand your agency’s authority to grant exemptions in such cases. We respectfully request that your agency implement this waiver authority and establish a protocol to effectively assist the Afghan and Iraqi linguists who, under the current statute, may fall under these terrorism bars.

The U.S. Armed Forces have relied on Afghan and Iraqi translators and interpreters since the beginning of the wars in 2001 and 2003, respectively. Thousands of these individuals have risked their lives to provide crucial linguistic and cultural services without which the missions could not have been conducted. However, they are labeled traitors by their communities for working with U.S. troops and are often unable to return home for fear of being killed. Some of them find themselves in the paradoxical situation of still being employed by the U.S. military, while at the same time denied entry to the United States based on prior Tier III group affiliations as defined by the Patriot Act.

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Page 2

The application of sweeping terrorism bars to host-nation linguists creates a deep sense of betrayal among those who faithfully stood by the United States yet now find themselves ensnared by these provisions. We urge you to address this issue; the fate of these linguists is the subject of international concern, including ours, as colleagues in the language professions.

Sincerely,

Linda Fitchett
President, AIIC

Marion Boers
President, FIT

Aurora Humarán
President, IAPTI

Maya Hess
President, Red T