
OPEN LETTER

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August 2017

M. Emmanuel Macron
Président de la République
Palais de l’Elysée
55, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris
France

Are Afghan interpreters who assisted French troops the new Harkis?

Dear President Macron,

As representatives of the undersigned European and international translator and interpreter organizations, we have been disheartened by your country’s reluctance to grant protective visas to Afghan interpreters who worked for the French troops. However, we are optimistic that your presidency will right this humanitarian wrong and increase resettlements to France.

During your campaign, you compared the treatment of local Afghan interpreters who assisted the French army to that of the Harkis who served alongside the French in the Algerian War. You clearly stated that the Harkis were “victims of the betrayal of the French State, abandoned although they fought in our ranks. We made a comparable mistake with our Afghan interpreters: it was a betrayal.”

That enlightened statement is very encouraging and hopefully means France will usher in a more honorable policy that affords protection to our endangered colleagues. To date, only a limited number of visas have been issued, while many more have been denied without explanation. This abandonment of former allies has been compounded by the arbitrary selection criteria applied, among them type of employment and degree of danger. Insurgents are not so selective – they consider all such interpreters collaborators and traitors.

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According to the United Nations Security Council Report of June 15, 2017, the security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely volatile, with the period January–March of this year showing the highest total of security-related incidents ever recorded for that quarter since 2001. Simply put, the country is in turmoil: The Taliban is even more powerful than when the international mission was launched 16 years ago, and as other insurgent groups such as Islamic State gain a foothold, the threat to the “infidel” interpreters increases exponentially.

We urge you to open your country’s doors to the left-behind linguists and accelerate the processing of their visas. A more generous approach will not only save the lives of interpreters but is imperative for the success of future engagements.

Sincerely,

Maya Hess, President, Red T

Linda Fitchett, Chair, Conflict Zone Group, International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

Kevin Quirk, President, International Federation of Translators (FIT)

Aurora Humarán, President, International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI)

Angela Sasso, President, Critical Link International (CLI)

Debra Russell, President, World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

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Björn Bratteby, President, Société française des traducteurs (SFT)

Sandra Faure and Rachel Fréry, Co-Presidents, French Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Translators (AFILS)

Rafael Carrillo, Chair, National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT, USA)

Mohamed ElGohary, Manager, Global Voices Lingua

Cc: Mme. Florence Parly, Minister of the Armed Forces

M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs