
OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



August 2013

M. François Hollande
Président de la République
Palais de l'Élysée
55, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris
France

Protective Asylum for Endangered Afghan Host Nation Linguists

Dear President Hollande,

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 organization 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 French Armed Forces.

The undersigned, representing over 80,000 translators and interpreters worldwide, applaud you for personally doubling the number of visas available to Afghan personnel, which includes interpreters who risked their lives to provide crucial linguistic and cultural services to your military. By pursuing a policy which acknowledges that linguists are indispensable to international operations, you not only succeed in protecting them but also secure future recruits.

While we understand that approximately 70 interpreters and their families have found a safe haven in France, many more were left behind. In fact, of the roughly 800 locally recruited personnel, most of whom applied for visas, we believe that the majority are interpreters. Unfortunately, many of their requests for asylum either have not been processed, or candidates are rejected with little or no explanation based on arbitrary selection criteria. Among these criteria are type of employment and degree of danger, both of which ignore

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the fact that all linguists who assisted French troops are labeled traitors by insurgents and are particularly at risk following troop withdrawals. As has been amply documented by the French and international media, they are high-priority targets in a security situation that is steadily deteriorating. According to the most recent United Nations report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan, the number of civilians injured or killed increased by 23% in the first six months of 2013 versus the same period in the previous year.

As an international community of language professionals, we advocate for France to reverse her policy and resume granting visas to our Afghan colleagues. Given their extreme vulnerability, the only guarantee of safety for these interpreters is if they are welcomed to France.

Sincerely,

Linda Fitchett
President, AIIC

Marion Boers
President, FIT

Aurora Humarán
President, IAPTI

Maya Hess
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