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# OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS  
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



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June 2013

Her Excellency Dr. Angela Merkel  
Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Bundeskanzleramt  
Willy-Brandt-Straße 1  
10557 Berlin  
Germany

## **Protective Asylum for Endangered Afghan Host Nation Linguists**

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

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), the Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer (BDÜ), and Red T, a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings, we urge you to grant protective asylum to Afghan host nation linguists who served the Bundeswehr.

Germany has been a leader among the coalition forces in Afghanistan and local interpreters were vital to its mission. Now, however, it lags behind other nations in creating expedited visa procedures and offering asylum in recognition of the risks their Afghan linguists now face. In fact, as of this writing, very few applications have been reviewed by your interagency task force; what's more, they all were rejected with little or no explanation. In doing so, the task force denied Afghan applicants the rights specified in Section 22 of the German Residence Act, according to which an individual is eligible for a residence visa on the basis of "urgent humanitarian reasons."

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Page 2

As has been amply documented by the national and international media, allied interpreters constitute the most vulnerable population in Afghanistan at the moment. They are labeled traitors, subjected to the Taliban's brutal campaign of retaliation, and driven into hiding. Relocation to another part of the country is not a sufficient solution.

While we understand that rebuilding the nation requires the active support of skilled local personnel, the security situation in Afghanistan has been deteriorating steadily. According to the most recent figures released by the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office in Kabul, the number of insurgent attacks rose by 47 percent during the first quarter of 2013 in comparison with the prior year. Thus, we believe that the most responsible approach is to offer asylum now to these at-risk linguists to protect their lives until the security situation improves.

The perils for interpreters in Afghanistan are readily apparent. The value of their service to the Bundeswehr is indisputable. As an international community of language professionals, we sincerely hope that you will offer them a safe haven in Germany.

Sincerely,

Linda Fitchett  
President, AIIC

Marion Boers  
President, FIT

Aurora Humarán  
President, IAPTI

André Lindemann  
President, BDÜ

Maya Hess  
President, Red T

Cc:

Federal Minister of the Interior Dr. Hans-Peter Friedrich

Federal Minister of Defense Dr. Thomas de Maizière

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Guido Westerwelle