

OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS
AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



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March 2017

Ms. Federica Mogherini
High Representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European External Action Service
EEAS Building, 9A Rond Point Schuman
1046 Brussels
Belgium

INTERPRETER SAFETY IS OUR SAFETY

Dear Madam,

The undersigned European and international linguist associations, together with Red T, a non-profit dedicated to the protection of translators and interpreters worldwide, appeal to you for urgent action on behalf of the Iraqi and Afghan interpreters stranded in dreadful conditions across Europe as well as those still hiding in fear in their home countries.

These interpreters provided critical linguistic services to the coalition forces during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, as troops were gradually withdrawn, they mostly found themselves left behind to face a terrible fate. Considered traitors by insurgent groups, they and their families became high-priority targets, persecuted and executed with impunity.

Resettlement programs launched by individual countries have been operating with varying degrees of success. In many cases, interpreters are forced to wait years for a visa even though they were thoroughly vetted and military commanders strongly support calls to bring them to safety.

Without hope for a visa and desperate to escape, countless linguists have joined the flow of refugees towards Europe. As such, they have great difficulty being accepted into the country that employed them. Not only does the Dublin Agreement require they be processed in the country of first entry into the EU but regrettably some coalition countries, among them the UK and Germany, are now threatening to deport interpreters back to their home countries, claiming that the latter are “safe” despite clear and present danger.

You are certainly aware of the often shocking conditions in which refugees, including these interpreters, are languishing. Multiple press reports and a recent video by *The Guardian* entitled “Frozen out: the US interpreters abandoned on Europe’s border” graphically illustrate this dire

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state of affairs. Therefore, we ask that EEAS identify the interpreters amongst refugees without delay and help them reach and remain in safety. We further ask that you urge all EU countries and other governments whose forces participated in allied operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to offer protective visas to their former interpreters and process their applications speedily.

The European Union is based on principles of humanity, which dictate that we should help those who helped us. Thus, saving the lives of these linguists is a moral imperative. It is also a strategic imperative—since interpreters are an essential tool in the global war on terror, their safety is inextricably bound to the safety of us all.

Sincerely,

Angela Keil, President, International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

Linda Fitchett, Chair, AIIC Conflict Zone Group

Maya Hess, President, Red T

Henry Liu, President, International Federation of Translators and Interpreters (FIT)

Natacha Dalügge-Momme, President, FIT Europe

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)

Ivana Bucko, President, European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI)

Liese Katschinka, President, European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA)

Pascal Rillof, President, European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT)

Maurizio Viezzi, President, Conférence Internationale Permanente d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes (CIUTI)

Mohamed ElGohary, Manager, Global Voices Lingua

Esther M. Navarro-Hall, Chair, National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT, USA)

Cc:

Ms. Helga Schmid, Secretary General, EEAS

Mr. Jean-Christophe Belliard, Deputy Secretary General, Political Affairs

Mr. Pedro Serrano, Deputy Secretary General, Common Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Walter Stevens, Chair, Political and Security Committee

Lt. General Esa Pulkkinen, Director General, European Union Military Staff

Ms. Lotte Knudsen, Managing Director, Human Rights, Global and Multilateral Issues