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# OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



November 2020

The Hon. Marco E.L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship  
365 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1  
Canada



**Re: A Pathway to Protection**

Dear Minister,



The undersigned, representing the world’s major translator and interpreter associations, key advocacy organizations and academia, are deeply concerned about the safety of our colleagues who loyally served the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan. To escape persecution by insurgents, who view them as traitors for collaborating with CAF, these linguists have been forced underground in their home country or have fled, only to be stranded in refugee camps and other venues across Asia and Europe.



We understand that the Special Immigration Measures (SIM) program that had been instituted by the Harper government was terminated and left-behind interpreters were directed to utilize established visa channels. Such channels, however, present an extreme hardship that leaves these individuals particularly vulnerable. For those who remain in Afghanistan, in order to apply for a visa they must first obtain refugee status in another country, which involves travel through Taliban-controlled or contested territory. For the few who manage to escape, there is the risk of exposure in a foreign country hostile to collaborators and the complexities of applying while homeless or residing in a migrant camp. Compounding this are the challenges of the application process itself, which includes submitting evidence of persecution that is often impossible to procure, as well as an acute lack of resources and myriad other obstacles.



The U.S. president has stated his intent to withdraw troops from Afghanistan “by Christmas.” This timeline, coupled with the Taliban’s growing strength and the Afghan police’s inability to provide sufficient security, has made former CAF-allied interpreters increasingly fearful for their lives. That is why we ask that your country move quickly to bring these interpreters to safety on humanitarian and compassionate grounds (S.25.1(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act) by waiving the requirement to apply as a refugee from outside Afghanistan or, alternatively, by temporarily implementing a SIM program.





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As you may be aware, two of Canada's closest allies, Australia and the United Kingdom, have revisited their visa policies and adopted a more welcoming stance. For instance, this past spring Australia significantly facilitated the path to asylum for local Iraqi linguists, and last month the UK announced new legislation that broadens its Ex-Gratia Scheme to allow for the resettlement of dozens more Afghan interpreters. Trusting in Canada's fundamental humanity, as evidenced by its generous 2020-22 Immigration Levels Plan, we urge you to include within its admission targets the 30-40 Afghan interpreters still seeking refuge in your country.



The world language community and its humanitarian partners thank you in advance.

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)

Christopher Stone, President, World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

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

Loredana Polezzi, President, and the Executive Council, International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS)

Lucio Bagnulo, Head of Translation, Language Resource Centre, International Secretariat, Amnesty International

Betsy Fisher, Director of Strategy, International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)

Urtzi Urrutikoetxea, Chair, Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee, PEN International

Bill Rivers, Chair, FIT-North America

Linda Ballantyne, Chair, Canada Regional Bureau, AIIC

Ketty Nivyabandi, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada (English Section)

France-Isabelle Langlois, Directrice générale, Amnistie internationale Canada francophone

Richard Stursberg, President, PEN Canada

Gaston Bellemare, President, PEN Québec

Donald Barabé, Président, Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ)

Ted Wozniak, President, American Translators Association (ATA)

Annette Schiller, Chair, FIT Europe

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

Daniela Perillo, President, European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA)

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



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