



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators

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November 24, 2008

Dr. Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

RE: NAJIT opposes unmasking of Iraqi interpreters

Dear Dr. Gates:

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT) was founded in 1979 with its chief purpose being to promote professional standards of performance and integrity and to assist all entities in the administration of justice. We have approximately 1,300 active members.

As interpreters and translators, we are especially sensitive to the circumstances of our colleagues in Iraq who risk their lives to help U.S. and allied troops communicate with Iraqi citizens in the performance of their duty.

We are greatly disturbed at recent reports that Iraqi interpreters are being prevented from protecting their identities by means of a mask. The only rationale offered is the following from an email to the *Washington Post* written by one Lt. Col. Steve Stover: "We are a professional Army and professional units don't conceal their identity by wearing masks." Lt. Col. Stover stated that those dissatisfied with the new policy "can seek alternative employment."

The New Yorker interprets this statement in its headline: "Military to Interpreters: Drop Dead."

As the *Washington Post* story makes clear, Iraqi interpreters must disguise their identities to protect themselves and their families from retaliatory strikes by terrorists. There is not a question of military neatness; there is a problem of how to stay alive and keep their families safe.

We urge you to impress upon Lt. Col. Stover and his superiors the need to protect from unnecessary danger the lives of these professional interpreters, whose linguistic and cultural expertise constitute valuable assets to the military, which enable it to carry out the U.S. strategy of building necessary relationships with the Iraqi population while keeping our military personnel safe. We hope that somewhere in the chain of command there is a recognition of the danger this policy places on interpreters, and ultimately on our own troops. We urge you to review and overturn this ill-conceived policy.

Sincerely,

Isabel Frammer, Chair
National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators

cc:
House and Senate Armed Services Committee Members
Congressman Ike Skelton
Congressman Duncan Hunter
Senator Carl Levin
Senator John McCain