
OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS
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January 2017

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

THE WAR AGAINST ISIS CANNOT BE WON WITHOUT TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS

Dear Mr. President,

As representatives of the national and international community of translators and interpreters, we are greatly alarmed at the implications of your Executive Order on immigration for our colleagues who work in conflict zones. Specifically, we are referring to the 120-day suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and the 90-day entry ban for citizens of seven select countries. Both policies pose an immediate threat to allied interpreters in the theaters of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Linguists who accept assignments from foreign forces are often signing their own death warrant in doing so. Compounding the danger of bullets and roadside bombs, they regularly incur the wrath of insurgents who hunt, torture and execute them for their “traitorous” collaboration. They are forced to be on the run and live in hiding with their families, who themselves become targets.

Protecting these linguists is a matter of national security. In fact, they are your most critical asset in fighting terrorist groups such as Islamic State. The military is well aware of their importance and has supported the granting of Special Immigrant Visas, especially now that troops have been drawn down. As of this writing, the Department of Defense is compiling a list of Iraqi interpreters who assisted the US at great personal risk. We urge you to fully embrace these individuals, the most vetted category of refugees, by opening America’s doors to them. We further encourage you to use the power of your office to ensure that the SIV program—which has offered a safe haven to thousands of civilian interpreters—continues uninterrupted.

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Mr. President, the lives of host nation linguists, the lives of US troops, and America's standing in the world hang in the balance. Lifting the immigration ban will prevent the loss of life, restore trust, facilitate future recruiting and advance the war on terror.

Sincerely,

Maya Hess, President, Red T

Linda Fitchett, Chair, Conflict Zone Group, International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

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

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)

Michel Parent, Chairman, FIT North America

David Rumsey, President, American Translators Association (ATA)

Aron Aji, President, American Literary Translators Association (ALTA)

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

Cyril Flerov, Board Member, AIIC USA

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Language and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS)

Diana Rhudick, President, New England Translators Association (NETA)

Katharine Allen & Barry Olsen, Co-Presidents, InterpretAmerica

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