OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE

August 2016

The Hon. John McCallum, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1L1
Canada

Protective Asylum for
Endangered Afghan Host Nation Linguists

Dear Minister McCallum,

The undersigned, representing over 120,000 translators and interpreters in Canada and across the globe, are deeply concerned about the fate of our colleagues who served the Canadian forces in Afghanistan at great personal risk. A number of these linguists now find themselves left behind or stranded in European refugee camps fearing deportation to a homeland where they are targeted as traitors by insurgents. We urge you to recognize the dangers they face and the moral imperative to grant them asylum.

We trust you remember the harrowing story and treacherous journey of James Akam, who was granted asylum in Canada because you took a personal interest. The successful resettlement of Mr. Akam, however, should not remain an exception; there are others like him still waiting for protective visas, and they are equally deserving.

While we are grateful for Canada's Special Immigration Measures program that was in effect until September 2011, many interpreters were unable to submit their applications by that deadline. Now, their only choice is to go through existing immigration channels, as suggested by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) spokesman Rémi Larivière. However, this represents a particular hardship for them because of the perils of openly traveling in their home country; a general lack of resources; the challenges of the application process, including proof of persecution, which is often difficult to procure; and myriad other obstacles.

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AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE

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In talking with Afghan interpreters in both Afghanistan and Europe, we learned that they have great difficulty navigating the Canadian visa process despite the automated online help center. As such, if the only option for interpreters is to apply under established programs, we consider it essential that a point person be designated at the IRCC to assist them with their applications. Alternatively, the Special Immigration Measures program could be revived for a brief period to fast-track your linguist allies, or a similar measure instituted.

Although we understand that your country is dealing with a major influx of refugees from Syria, we hope you will prioritize linguists who have put their lives on the line alongside Canadian soldiers. As an international community of language professionals, we respectfully ask you to implement a policy that expedites visas for all your left-behind interpreters. We thank you in advance.

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)

Elena Mozhaeva, Regional Secretary, AIIC Canada

Ashley Campbell, President, Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC)

Michel Parent, Chair, FIT North America

Golnaz Aliyarzadeh, President, Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (CTTIC)

Réal Paquette, Président, Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ)

Cc: Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister