

OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



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July 2019

H.E. Dr. Angela Merkel
Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
Bundeskanzleramt
Willy-Brandt-Straße 1
10557 Berlin
Germany

Re: A plea for safe haven

Dear Madam Chancellor,

The undersigned international translator and interpreter associations, together with their human rights partners, commend you for your compassionate refugee policy over the years. We also applaud your government's substantial efforts to resettle Afghan interpreters whose lives were endangered because they worked for the German forces or other German entities. However, there remains a small group of linguists who continue to desperately seek humanitarian protection. For almost a year now, they have risked going public with their plea by demonstrating at Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif.

We understand that your government addressed this issue in Response 19/5454 of November 2, 2018 to the Parliamentary Minor Inquiry 19/4988 of October 15, 2018. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the demonstration is ongoing, we believe the channels of communication outlined in Responses 4 and 17 have not been successful. Specifically, the demonstrators are unclear about aspects of the visa application and appeals process. For instance, in the case of security-related denials, a lack of transparency concerning the grounds for rejection renders the filing of appeals virtually impossible. Moreover, considering that interpreters are thoroughly vetted throughout their service, these denials seem counterintuitive.

We are likewise concerned about the dwindling number of visas being granted, which we believe reflects an over-application of the risk assessment category: "No Individual Risk." On the contrary, locally employed civilian interpreters are among the most at-risk LEC populations in theaters of war as assessed by the latest UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan. Your Foreign Office reached a similar conclusion in its Afghanistan Situation Report of July 25, 2018, where it states that collaborators with foreign forces are "priority targets of insurgents,"

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citing from a declaration of the Taliban leadership that “[it] will employ new, complex tactics to crush, kill and imprison the American invaders and its allies.” Thus, we urge your government to recognize this risk, especially in light of a resurgent Taliban, and uphold the rights specified in Section 22 of the German Residence Act according to which an individual is eligible for a residence visa on the basis of “urgent humanitarian reasons.”

Madam Chancellor, the importance of linguists in conflict and post-conflict missions cannot be overstated. The world language community hopes there will be further outreach to the Camp Marmal protesters with the goal of fast-tracking them to safety in Germany.

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)

Debra Russell, President, World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

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

Annette Schiller, Chair, FIT Europe

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

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

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

Marcus Grotian, Chairman, Patenschaftsnetzwerk Afghanische Ortskräfte e.V.

Cc:

Mr. Horst Seehofer, Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, Federal Minister of Defense

Mr. Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs