



OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE



April 2021

The Hon. Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2100 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520



Re: Lives at Stake

Dear Secretary Blinken,



On behalf of the world language community and its humanitarian partners, we applaud your commitment to move forward on relocation requests by local civilian interpreters who assisted American forces in Afghanistan. For too long, these linguists and their families have been languishing in the Special Immigrant Visa queue while trying to stay alive day after day in the face of ongoing insurgent threats.



We recognize that a review of the SIV program is currently underway; however, in light of President Biden's accelerated troop withdrawal timeline, the undersigned believe any less-flawed iteration will not be implemented in time to save our colleagues, who were the "face of the coalition." That is why we urge you to extract interpreters and their families to a safe location outside Afghanistan prior to the September 11 deadline and process their visas from there. There is historical precedent for such an evacuation, notably Operation Frequent Wind in Vietnam, where thousands of Americans and Vietnamese at risk were airlifted to safety by U.S. forces over the course of two days.



Acting with honor toward allied interpreters is crucial to the United States' standing in the world. It is also a strategic imperative – since linguists play an essential role in the global fight against terrorism, their safety is inextricably bound to the safety of us all.



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)

Cont'd



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 Sue-Ann Harding, Chair of 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)

Romana Cacchioli, Executive Director, PEN International

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Amanda Seewald, President, Joint National Committee for Languages – National Council for Language and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS)

Bill Rivers, Chair, FIT North America

David Violet, Chair, AIIC USA

Ted Wozniak, President, American Translators Association (ATA)

Ellen Elias-Bursac, President, American Literary Translators Association (ALTA)

Aimee Benavides, Chair, National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT)

Annette Schiller, Chair, FIT Europe

Stéphan Barrère, 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)