



# Hearing on Interpreters in Conflict Zones in the European Parliament

Many western governments still do not recognise the debt of gratitude they owe to the local interpreters without whom their troops could not have operated in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Five members from different political parties hosted a hearing on 31 January 2017 in the European Parliament, Brussels, on 'how to protect former interpreters in conflict zones'.

Two colleagues, Silvia Camilo and Luis Pinto had seen, a year ago, [a heart-rending film](#) made for the Guardian newspaper by Max Duncan and Michael Tait. It showed two Afghan interpreters who had worked for the US military in Afghanistan but, refused visas in the USA, they had fled their country after receiving death threats and were now languishing in miserable freezing conditions on the Serbian border. Safety in Europe was being denied by closed borders. Silvia and Luis were shocked. They desperately wanted to help.

Together with the Chair of the AIIC 'Interpreters in Conflict Zones' working group, a plan was devised to convince the European Parliament to take up the cause of the many locally employed interpreters abandoned by Western armies when they withdrew from Iraq and Afghanistan. With the help of Ana Gomes MEP and Marisa Matias MEP and their staff, a multi-party hearing was prepared during the course of 2017. It took place on January 31st 2018, hosted by Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias together with Ernest Urtazun MEP, Carlos Coelho MEP and Javier Nart MEP.

[The video of the hearing](#) can be viewed on Youtube.

Sadly, we heard from Max Duncan that one of the interpreters in the video finally returned to Afghanistan where his life is threatened. The other managed to get to France, but his request for asylum was denied.

Many of our Western governments still do not recognise the debt of gratitude they owe to the local interpreters without whom their troops could not have operated in Iraq and



Afghanistan – and without whom they will not be able to intervene in any future operations on foreign soil.

The sincerity of the MEPs to take this matter forward at European and international level was apparent and excellently [summed up by Carlos Coelho](#), who stated: "Our competence in this context is much limited. But as Members of this house, we will continue to raise awareness, influence our own Member States and - surely - the other European Institutions. We need to bring the attentions of the world to this issue. I would therefore be most glad to follow-up on the many initiatives mentioned here today..... It is time Europe delivers."

The AIIC ICZ group would like to thank Silvia and Luis whose compassion and conviction initiated this event; our MEP hosts; all the speakers and all those who support this project, especially our friends in the international coalition, built up over the years to advocate for interpreters at risk; Red T, FIT, IAPTI, CLI and WASLI.

You can follow our activities on FB <https://www.facebook.com/interpretersinconflictzones>

And please don't forget to sign our [petition to the UN](#), because we'll be holding a hearing in UNNY very soon.

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