

Fighting the terror

The war might be over, but translators and interpreters are still under attack in Iraq. At the FIT Conference, **Salah S Ali** made this plea on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Human Rights of Iraqi Translators

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Iraqi translators and interpreters who escaped assassination are being threatened by terrorist attacks every minute. Some have chosen to lock themselves up at home in a sort of voluntary house confinement, some have escaped to Baghdad or the north, depending on relatives at either city, or they are staying in remote and shabby hotels in various towns.

During the first months of the American occupation of Iraq most translators, including those with some knowledge of English, rushed to the Coalition camps to earn a living after a long period of unemployment. The Americans used to pay translators only \$20 a week.

Still, it was satisfactory in comparison with Saddam's impoverishment. The majority of translators working then were graduates of translation departments in the Universities of Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and Al-Mustansiriyah. They were happy to see the dictator depart and his statue taken down and dragged along Baghdad streets by a US tank: a happy moment in our history and the history of all freedom-loving nations. Yet as soon as the reign of terror departed the terror started again: a new wave of primitivism and darkness began and masked killers set about kidnapping, slaying and maiming translators, both men and women.

Unprecedented savagery

With the utmost savagery, unprecedented in history, the killers have the translators' heads cut off with unsharpened knives and place this over their bodies with a slip of paper on which the word 'traitor' is written in blood. No rational man would kill someone because of his education, his knowledge of English or his profession, or because his haircut style might follow a Western fashion, but those killers would kill for that and this just to point out the situation we are forced to put up with in Iraq.

The Iraqi translators who have managed to escape the knife or the bullet are still hiding in relatives' houses, either in nearby villages or with trusted friends where they cannot be hunted down or seen by terrorists. Some have left for Jordan, where they can hardly find the simplest means for living. Many high-ranking officials in the Iraqi government have been killed by car bombs or assassinated, so the government cannot provide protection for this 'small section of Iraqi society'.

The Americans give freedom but fail to guarantee safety or defend this freedom. Cans of Pepsi and bananas are seen everywhere in Iraqi cities, but alongside them

there are roadside bombs, mines and arbitrary fire. Even Americans are used to shooting arbitrarily at the least threat, real or imagined. In other words, cities in Iraq are virtual battlefields where mostly innocent people are victimised. The most miserable section are those translators' families who have lost their only breadwinner and are forced to send the children to work, sweeping the streets or selling cigarettes on sidewalks, instead of going to school and getting degrees like their fathers.

In Mosul, which is one of the most active hotbeds of terrorists, 13 translators have been killed, mostly Christians who the terrorists relish killing because being a translator, female and Christian is a must-kill.

In this shambles, the Society for the Protection of Human Rights of Iraqi Translators was founded by five colleagues, including myself. We started our work three months ago by visiting the murdered translators' families and establishing a fund to which we have twice contributed from our salaries and from donations we have sought through correspondence with the few humanitarian individuals we trust in the UAE and Jordan. We also went to an Assyrian populated district 60 miles from Mosul – Al-Qosh – to rent a building which we made our office and where we frequently meet and discuss the urgent cases. We can get there every day. However, we still need equipment to keep files and sustain follow-up efforts. In due course, we will have representation in Baghdad and Kirkok. Our plan includes the following tasks:

- 1 To furnish our office in Al-Qosh and expand its activities to include the cities of Kirkok and Baghdad.
- 2 To equip the office with two computers, a telephone and internet access.
- 3 To provide medical treatment to three recently wounded translators in Mosul, two have been given wheelchairs.
- 4 To follow up and help with the education of the children of murdered translators (four families are in urgent need of this support).
- 5 To find a provisional humanitarian asylum or scholarships for fugitive translators who are continuously threatened and are still hiding somewhere in our zone of activity or in a neighbouring country (Syria or Jordan).
- 6 Keep in contact with the FIT Committees, Council, Member Associations, National Translation Centres and other Humanitarian Associations like PEN with the aim of helping our Society achieve its tasks.

Finally, we call on translators and interpreters all around the world to do what you can to aid those in danger and help provide them with the vital assistance they need.

■ *If you can help, contact the Chairman of The Society: Salah S. Ali, Assistant Professor, College of Political Science, University of Mosul, Iraq. Tel +964-60-811507; mobile: 07701853234.*

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