



Defence Committee

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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Defence

Ministry of Defence

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13 September 2018

Dear Gavin,

I would like to thank you and the Department for the Government's response to the Defence Committee's Fifth Report of the current Session, *Lost in Translation? Afghan Interpreters and Other Locally Employed Civilians* (HC 572).

However, I remain concerned by continuing press reports that there are former LECs in Afghanistan who are subject to an apparently oppressive level of intimidation, including ongoing threats to life.

The enclosed article from the *Daily Mail* dated 30 August cites several examples of former LECs who remain in considerable fear for their safety. One reports an assassination attempt that took place in Kabul, despite the Government Response identifying Kabul as being considered "a much safer place to work, as evidenced by the fact there have so far been no on-duty deaths of LECs working in Kabul". These reports, if they are accurate, do little to provide reassurance that the assessments of the Intimidation and Investigation Unit are fully representative of the true level of risk, in Kabul and elsewhere.

This article also suggests that despite your very welcome decision to amend the eligibility cut-off date of the Ex-Gratia Scheme (EGS) back to 1 May 2006, former LECs newly eligible under the scheme are experiencing delay, with applications taking over a year to process, and a lack of information during the application process.

Lastly, a second article of 4 September identifies the plight of a former LEC who is currently stranded in Athens and has, according to the report, been told that he does not qualify for LEC assistance schemes.

In light of these reports, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

1. Are you confident in light of these continued reports that the system of risk assessment used in the LEC schemes is sufficiently robust and reflects the situation on the ground, in Kabul and elsewhere?
2. What is the target timescale for new applications under the revised eligibility criteria of the EGS?
3. How many new applications have been received since the amendment of the eligibility criteria?
4. Has the IIU received further resources to process new applications following the amendment of the eligibility criteria?
5. What information is provided to new applicants under the revised EGS and how regularly are they updated about the status of their applications?
6. On what grounds (e.g. for alleged desertion) are individuals who would normally be eligible for either LEC scheme barred from applying? Is there any opportunity for a former LEC who has been barred to appeal this decision?

Yours sincerely,

Julian



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MailOnline

MailOnline

August 30, 2018 Thursday 10:48 PM GMT

Afghan interpreters are betrayed again as promises of sanctuary in UK is delayed while ISIS thugs warn they will 'die like dogs' as they face doorstep executions back home

BYLINE: David Williams for the Daily Mail

SECTION: NEWS; Version:2

LENGTH: 750 words

- . Afghan interpreters have been told it may be more than a year before decision
- . Translators who were 'eyes and ears' of troops warn delay leaves them exposed
- . UK's longest serving translator recently attacked by suspected Taliban gunman

Afghan interpreters promised the chance of sanctuary in Britain have been told it may be more than a year before decisions are made on their fate.

Dozens of translators who were the 'eyes and ears' of British troops warn the delay leaves them exposed to a resurgent Taliban who have said they will 'die like dogs'.

Britain's longest serving translator was recently attacked by a suspected Taliban gunman outside his home in Kabul, the Afghan capital.

Two more say they are 'in talks' with people smugglers to enter Britain illegally rather than face more months of uncertainty over their cases.

It is 11 weeks since Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson gave fresh hope to translators by announcing he was tearing up a 'failed' policy which meant the men who risked their lives for UK troops had been abandoned.

Officials said about 50 who served on the frontline in Helmand, and their families, would be granted visas to Britain under new qualifying measures.

The decision was a huge victory for the Daily Mail's three-year Betrayal Of The Brave campaign, which highlighted how interpreters left in Afghanistan were shot at, issued with death threats and even executed on their doorsteps.

Writing in the Mail, Mr Williamson said: 'We will do what is right to honour their extraordinary service.'

But translators, who were told to apply for their cases to be reviewed by a special UK unit in Kabul, say they feel 'betrayed again' because of the confusion, lack of clarity and information.

Former SAS translator Abdul, 33, who worked on the frontlines of Helmand for five years, said: 'When I contacted the unit they could provide little information and said it could be more than a year before a decision was made.'

'There was no suggestion of an interview or fresh examination of my service or the threat to my family situation.'

Afghan interpreters are betrayed again as promises of sanctuary in UK is delayed while ISIS thugs warn they will 'die like dogs' as they face doorstep executions back home MailOnline August 30, 2018 Thursday 10:48 PM GMT

His concerns were echoed by Waheed, 26, who worked on the frontlines for three years and is negotiating with people smugglers over coming to the UK.

'Mr Williamson's announcement gave us fresh hope but nothing appears to be happening,' he said.

'My best chance of living a safe life will be to try and come to the UK with people smugglers.'

Shaffy, 28, who was branded an 'infidel spy' and told he would 'die like a dog' days after he was shown on TV with then prime minister David Cameron during a visit to Helmand, said: 'It is nearly three months since I gave my details to the unit and applied under the policy but I have heard nothing.'

Under the old relocation scheme, interpreters had to be serving on an arbitrary date in December 2012 to qualify. They also had to have served in Helmand - the scene of the fiercest fighting - for at least a year.

Mr Williamson promised he would widen the qualifying period to include those who spent at least a year with British forces as far back as 2006.

The qualifying period for the relocation policy now extends back to May 1, 2006 - and those made redundant up to 2012. But translators claim there was no formal redundancy policy between 2006 and 2012.

Rafi, who was blown up in Helmand and became the supervisor for all the UK military's translators, said: 'I know of no one made redundant - contracts were just terminated - so this needs to be explained.'

Three weeks after Mr Williamson announced the change in policy, suspected Taliban gunmen attacked Britain's longest serving translator who had previously been refused sanctuary.

Two men opened fire as the 34-year-old translator, known as Ricky, returned home in his car in Kabul. Ricky jumped clear and ran inside his house. One bullet hit his seat. He said: 'I was very lucky. I believe it was the Taliban or Islamic State because of my work for the British forces.'

Ricky said last night that British officials had 'accepted I am in danger' but merely offered to relocate him in Afghanistan.

'I have done 17 years' service for the UK Government but now that I need their help, they are trying to leave me and my family here to the very real dangers, it is so disappointing,' he said.

An MoD spokesman said: 'Our specialist team is working hard to identify which interpreters are eligible for relocation. This clearly takes time, as it requires close collaboration with other departments, the Afghan government and the International Organisation for Migration.'

MailOnline

MailOnline

September 4, 2018 Tuesday 2:42 PM GMT

Afghan interpreter, 30, who 'risked his life' working for the British Army for more than three years is now sleeping rough in Athens after his application to live in the UK was rejected

BYLINE: Lara Keay For Mailonline

SECTION: NEWS; Version:1

LENGTH: 1303 words

- . Mohammed Nabi Wardak, 30, was a British Army interpreter from 2008 to 2011
- . The father-of-four regularly risked his life in Helmand before fleeing in 2016
- . Home Office denied him entry despite repeated threats from the Taliban

An Afghan interpreter who risked his life to work for the British Army for three years is sleeping rough on the streets of Athens after his bid to live in the UK was rejected.

Mohammed Nabi Wardak, 30, worked as a British Army interpreter between 2008 and 2011 and fled his homeland in 2016 after being threatened by the Taliban.

But despite promises from the UK Government, the father-of-four has been told he and his family 'do not qualify' for relocation in the UK.

The Home Office claims it is because he left the Army on two occasions - once because his mother was seriously ill and the other because of heightened threats from Taliban forces.

Afghan translator killed himself after being refused UK residency

An interpreter who worked for British troops in Afghanistan killed himself in 2016 after being told he did not qualify for asylum in the UK and would be deported.

Nangyalai Dawoodzai, 29, was said to have been 'deeply depressed' about the threat of being thrown out of the country despite working with British forces in Helmand.

Fellow interpreters said he had spoken of suicide in the weeks leading up to his death in April 2016. He hanged himself at a friend's flat in West Bromwich before he could leave.

Mr Dawoodzai had paid people smugglers to reach the UK after receiving Taliban death threats.

But he was told he could not stay in Britain because he had been fingerprinted in Italy and had to claim asylum there.

It is believed he did not qualify for the 'relocation scheme' because of its strict rules about working for the British in December 2012 and serving for 12 months in Helmand.

There has been outrage in the UK, after several translators were denied the right to settle on British shores, highlighted by the Daily Mail's Betrayal of the Brave campaign.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has been promising the introduction of new measures to ensure those who served with the Army in Afghanistan are given UK visas - but many are still fighting.

But now charity Faith Matters is trying to bring Mohammed to the UK with an online petition on Change.org that has already accumulated 7,500 signatures.

He told the Independent from Athens: 'The army said they liked me, that I did a good job. I saved lives in the battlefield, taking part in ambush operations. I did all I could, but they've left me behind.

'I feel betrayed. I worked for the UK. I am not a normal refugee. I sacrificed my life for them.

'They should protect my children. My children are in danger. I don't want them to be punished because of me. I left my house and my children for them, why are they forgetting that?'

During his three years as an interpreter, Mohammed worked in conflict zones including Helmand, Musa Kala and the heavily fought over district of Kajaki.

While working for the British Mohammed received several threats directed at him and his family, both in the form of letters and knocks on his door.

He informed the military of the threats and was assured they had been acknowledged - but nothing was done.

The threats later escalated and Mohammed was left fearing for his life after twice being contacted by senior Taliban operatives, who told him he was on their target list.

In 2016, the Taliban took over areas around Mohammed's village and, fearing for his life, he fled for Turkey.

Mohammed is now pleading with the British government to reconsider his case, as he says his wife and children - aged eight, six, five and three - are in danger from Taliban insurgents.

Mohammed has been trying to contact the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees ever since - but to no avail.

In May 2018, Mohammed crossed from Turkey into Greece, and has been sleeping rough in Athens since, where he has been assaulted and robbed multiple times.

Hero translator fears for his life back in Afghanistan

An Afghan translator credited with helping save the lives of dozens of British soldiers trapped for nearly two months by the Taliban has said that their fighters have been trying to hunt him down.

Fardin, 37, said that twice in the past ten days a suspected Taliban fighter had been in his home neighbourhood of the Afghan capital Kabul asking neighbours and shopkeepers exactly where he lives with his wife and children.

'I am terrified,' he said. 'My wife is crying constantly. All the evidence is that they are searching for me and that can only be for one reason... to kill me because I work for the British. They know what I look like, they know what I did for the British and they want revenge.'

Fardin, who still works with British forces in Kabul, was one of three Afghan interpreters who were the 'eyes and ears' of 88 soldiers cut off and surrounded by 500 Taliban at the outpost of Musa Qala in Helmand for 56 days. He monitored Taliban radio signals, providing vital details of planned attacks.

Despite his bravery and the fact he has worked with the British for more than a decade, he has been told he does not qualify for sanctuary in the UK because he did not spend a full year on the front line.

The refusal to help Fardin and his family has outraged former soldiers. Sergeant Freddie Kruyer, 49, an ex-intelligence officer, said Fardin and his two colleagues were 'instrumental' in saving soldiers' lives a 'number of times' during the siege in autumn 2006.

Now, faith community organisation Faith Matters are working with Mohammed and an organisation in Athens to help bring he and his family safely to the UK.

Fiyaz Mughal, founder of Faith Matters, wrote: 'We are disgusted that this brave man, who had to leave his country since he helped our military and became a target of the Taliban, is left to fend on the streets of Athens.'

'Risking his life for us, he was told 'that he and his family do not qualify for relocation to the UK'. This simply cannot be right.

'This is an unacceptable situation where a man who helped our armed forces lives in a dire situation and has been left to fend for himself.'

A Home Office spokesman said they did not comment on individual cases, but the newspaper: 'We recognise the vital role interpreters and local staff played in operations in Afghanistan.

'We are the only nation with a permanent expert team based in Kabul to investigate claims of intimidation, offering tailored security advice and support to individuals and their families.

'Over 1,200 former Afghan staff and their families have been relocated to the UK through our redundancy scheme.

'Those who have been offered relocation are the ones who have faced the greatest danger working alongside British troops in Helmand province.

'The defence secretary recently announced an expansion of the scheme allowing for a further 200 visas to be issued.'

The Faith Matters petition reads: 'Please sign this petition to collectively send a message to the Government that this brave man who risked all for us, cannot be left to fend for himself, with his family also at risk.

'This Government talks much about tackling extremism and terrorism. The least we can do is to provide sanctuary to those who stood with us in the fight against it.'

One signatory comment reads: 'I strongly believe we owe people who helped our armed services in conflict a debt and if life in their home country has become unsafe because of the help they gave we are obliged to give them a home in the UK.'

Another wrote: 'I have signed this because this man has worked legally for the UK government in a dangerous situation which effectively continues for him, but can be removed by allowing him into the UK - the very country which he has helped.'