

## Found in Translation ▶

# ترجمة



Interpreter and cultural adviser Khalil Hotaki, who has put his life at risk countless times serving Canada  
photo: courtesy Jess Dutton

Working as an interpreter and translator in a foreign mission can be demanding: bringing clarity to a wide range of communications is vital to much of what happens there. But doing it in the midst of a deadly conflict and within complex cultures creates challenges that are vastly increased.

You couldn't find a better person for the job than Khalil Hotaki, who has worked for the last six years as a locally engaged interpreter and cultural advisor, first at Canada's mission in Kandahar and now in Kabul.

Hotaki, 34, was born in the city of Kandahar, where his father worked as a judge. The government was toppled by the Communist coup and Soviet invasion when he was just two years old, and his father was arrested. The family moved to Kabul, where his father was released from prison six months later.

Hotaki grew up in the city, which was suffering from ever-worsening security, with civil war among the mujahedeen. Finally, with the emergence of the Taliban, the family fled in 1993 to Pakistan, living as refugees in Peshawar for nine years and then returning to Kabul in 2002.

The years of upheaval took a toll on Hotaki's career. He had hoped to study law, following in his father's footsteps, and to work as a judge or prosecutor, but there were no opportunities for higher education among refugees in Pakistan. Once back in Afghanistan, he capitalized on the English he had learned as a young student in Kabul and then in Peshawar, and became an English-language instructor and an interpreter of Pashto and Dari, the two official languages of Afghanistan. When the word went out in 2005 that Canada was looking for interpreters, especially with an expanding role for the Canadian Forces and civilian staff of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT), he jumped at the chance.

Because he was single and didn't live in Kandahar, Hotaki took a room at the KPRT at the Camp Nathan Smith compound. That way, he was able to help after hours, particularly with night-time patrols.