

Language in conflict: A voice for translators and interpreters under fire

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At a time when warfare, turmoil and mass migration afflict many parts of the world, a growing body of literature points to both the importance and the vulnerability of linguists in conflict situations and post-conflict humanitarian actions. As bridges of understanding and messengers of peace, they are in urgent need of protection. That is why, in a historic first, the world language community has taken a progressively collective and activist stance, no longer remaining silent when colleagues are under threat. They have formed a vibrant advocacy coalition comprising Red T, the only non-profit organization dedicated to linguists in high-risk settings; the major international language associations AIIC, FIT, IAPTI, CLI, and WASLI; the international association of university institutes with translation and interpretation programs CIUTI; as well as various transnational and national organizations.

Red T founder Dr. Maya Hess and Linda Fitchett, former president of AIIC and current chair of its Conflict Zone Interpreter Group, will discuss the coalition's initiatives, including the Open Letter Project, the development of advisory and safety guidelines, and the drive for international legal instruments such as a UN Resolution addressing the safety of civilian translators and interpreters and a best practices protocol along the lines of the Montreux Document. They will give a voice to the literary translator who was imprisoned for articulating inconvenient content; the court interpreter who received death threats to halt the wheels of justice; the conflict zone linguists who are kidnapped, tortured and murdered for allying with foreign forces; and the fixers who, along with journalists, are arrested and killed in an attempt to suppress freedom of the press. Above all, they will invite audience members to explore their professional and humanitarian responsibility to fellow linguists most at risk.

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