



# OPEN LETTER

PROTECTING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS WORLDWIDE

June 2023



H.E. Mr. Alain Berset  
President of the Swiss Confederation  
Bundeshaus West  
CH-3003 Bern  
Switzerland



**Re: “Even one victim is one too many”–  
Request for a Resolution to Protect Civilian Translators/Interpreters in Conflict Situations**

Your Excellency,

We congratulate you on Switzerland’s election to the United Nations Security Council for the 2023–24 term. Among the priorities for your country’s tenure is the protection of civilians, which, in your UNSC speech on May 23, you called “a matter of the utmost urgency.” This is indeed an imperative for the undersigned, whose most pressing concern is the protection of civilian translators and interpreters (T/Is) operating in conflict situations. As recent wars have made tragically evident, linguists in such settings are injured and killed in significant numbers. Globally, they have become high-value targets of state and non-state actors alike, who view them as traitors, spies, or subversives and imprison, abduct, torture, and murder them with impunity.



At the suggestion of the Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations, Red T, a non-profit for the protection of T/Is in high-risk settings, was invited by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations to present at the December 2022 meeting of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Civilians (GoF PoC). On behalf of the world language community, we familiarized GoF PoC members with the lack of special protection for T/Is in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding and urged them to take up the matter.



Your Excellency, we would be very grateful if your country would spearhead a debate in the Security Council regarding a UN Security Council Resolution with the goal of adding this key building block to the UN’s PoC architecture. We envision that such a text would articulate translator and interpreter rights and establish a normative framework for future protection. It would explicitly recognize that linguists in conflict and other complex situations face the ongoing risk of threats and violence. It would call on states to publicly condemn attacks and ensure accountability by dedicating resources to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. We have attached a draft resolution that mirrors texts adopted to safeguard journalists and could serve as a blueprint for the debate.



Journalists and medical personnel benefit from the recognition UN resolutions bestow on them. In the case of translators and interpreters, this is even more critical because we are all too often mistrusted and persecuted. Thus, special recognition by the UN would usher in a paradigm shift in how we are perceived and treated – not as traitors but as impartial language facilitators who should not be attacked for our crucial function in high-risk arenas. In other words, a UN resolution could make a significant difference in the perception of our role, which, in turn, would save lives.





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The world language community believes that the time has come for an international response to what is a grave international problem. Until now, our voices have not been heard, our human rights have been ignored, our lives have been lost – translators and interpreters have been left behind for too long.

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to hearing from you.



Sincerely,

Maya Hess, President, Red T

Jennifer Fearnside-Bitsios, President, International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

Linda Fitchett, Chair, AIIC Conflict Zone Group

Alison Rodriguez, President, International Federation of Translators (FIT)

Aurora Humarán, President, International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI)

Angela Sasso, President, Critical Link International (CLI)

Christopher Stone, President, World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

Bart Defrancq, President, Conférence Internationale Permanente d'Instituts Universitaires de

Traducteurs et Interprètes (CIUTI)

Sue-Ann Harding, President, and Cristina Marinetti, Chair of the Executive Council, International

Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS)

Lucio Bagnulo, Head of Translation and Language Strategy, Language Resource Centre, International

Secretariat, Amnesty International

Romana Cacchioli, Executive Director, PEN International

Urtzi Urrutikoetxea, Chair, Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee, PEN International

Francesca Novajra, President, Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires (CEATL)

Genny Brusegan Conte, President, European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI)

Barbara Rován, President, European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA)

Lieven Buysse, President, European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT)

Celia Kfoury, President, Association of Professional Conference Interpreters (APIC)

Dominik Riedo, President, Swiss German PEN Centre

Maria Raffaella Bruno Realini, Secretary General, Swiss Italian and Rhaeto-Romansh PEN Centre

Alix Parodi, President, Swiss Romand PEN Centre

Aleksandra Razborssek, President, Swiss Association of Court Interpreters and Translators (juslingua.ch)

Zoltán Szalai, Chairman, Swiss Association of Sworn Translators (ASTJ)

Roxane Jacobi, President, Swiss Association for Translation, Terminology and Interpreting (ASTTI)



Cc: H.E. Dr. Ignazio Cassis, Federal Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs

H.E. Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

Encl.