



# Communiqué

## INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATION DAY 2014

### Language Rights: Essential to All Human Rights Les droits linguistiques, dimension essentielle des droits humains

Most people have never heard of language rights. What does this mean specifically and why is it important?

If we are to assume that all humans have an inherent equal right to dignity, freedom, justice, health and peace, as reflected in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, then we have to consider how one is to attain, exercise and/or protect those rights. Irrespective of the laws, regulations or conditions of the environment we all live in, effective communication will be required for us to be able to defend these rights. Without being able to understand and/or express ourselves in our primary language, we are simply not going to be able to explain or defend ourselves when facing a difficult situation that threatens those very rights to dignity, freedom, justice, health and peace.

There is a wide range of situations in which human rights may be threatened if people are not able to exercise their language rights. Think about immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, tourists and those working abroad. What happens if they fall ill and need to consult a medical specialist, unwittingly break a law, need to apply for social services or are involved in a dispute with an employer? How can they exercise their rights when they cannot even communicate their most basic needs and circumstances because they are forced to use a language they do not speak or write? This is where interpreters, translators and terminologists – all language professionals – play an essential role.

Let us take the examples of justice and health. If we are accused of a wrongdoing, we need to understand what documents we are being asked to sign and the words the judge, lawyers or other law enforcement professionals are speaking to us. In a hospital, how can we seek treatment if we cannot explain our symptoms for a doctor to diagnose our condition, or be expected to sign an informed consent form if we do not understand what it says?

This is where the language professionals come in. These professionals ensure that individuals who do not speak the dominant language are able to understand and be understood, and access these services, so that effective communication takes place and their

#### INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRANSLATORS

*"The voice of associations of translators, interpreters and terminologists around the world"*

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basic human rights are protected. Terminologists trained in these specialized areas work to harmonize terminology within and among different languages so that due diligence can take place and patient security can be ensured. The same applies when terminologists compile glossaries or translators and interpreters intercept written and oral foreign-language messages that are a threat to our security and peace. Other areas where language services are essential include social services, governmental services, and the myriad of documents that lawful citizens need to understand in order to be guaranteed their rights and have their security protected.

The inability to obtain these essential language services has resulted in horrifying documented cases of injustice, incarceration and irreversible negative health outcomes. We all need to work together to raise awareness and ensure that language services are available at all the interfaces between the public and service-providers.

**Join us** in educating the public about **language rights** on International Translation Day, 30 September 2014.

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