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MEDIA RELEASE
For immediate release

International Translation Day 2014
Language and human rights

On 30 September each year, the world celebrates International Translation Day. This is the day that we use to educate others about our profession and to salute all our colleagues and the work that they do. The International Federation of Translators (FIT) selects a theme each year and that for 2014 is **Language Rights: Essential to All Human Rights**.

The [communiqué](#) issued by FIT on this year's theme outlines different ways that language rights are related to human rights. We in South Africa are particularly aware of how intimately language and human rights are linked. It was a disregard for these rights that set us on the path to full **democracy** with the Soweto Riots in 1976. The importance of language was recognised in our new constitution and today we have 11 official languages in this country, a move intended to restore the dignity of our mother tongues. This is the case in law at least – in practice, much work remains.

The importance of language and having skilled and competent interpreters and translators has been brought home to South Africans in a very public fashion this year through the **interpreting disasters** at the Oscar Pistorius trial, which clearly illustrates the close link between language and human rights. In how many court cases is the level of interpreting provided key to the outcome of a trial and someone's future? Extend this scenario to other avenues of life and it becomes clear that it is essential that the importance of language services be recognised and that these services are only entrusted to persons with the requisite skill and experience.

In the last two years two important pieces of legislation have been passed in South Africa that will contribute to upholding human rights through language: the Use of Official Languages Act (Act 12 of 2012) and the South African Language Practitioners' Council Act (Act 8 of 2014) (download copies at http://translators.org.za/sati_cms/index.php?frontend_action=display_text_content&content_id=4511). November this year is the deadline for government departments and public entities to have their language policies and units in place, and we look forward to this empowering the users of our indigenous languages. Once the SA Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) is in place, citizens can be assured of quality language services.

At an international level, we are all aware of the danger that working as an interpreter or translator can imply in certain parts of the world. Translators are imprisoned for making certain works available to the world and interpreters are killed for working for foreign military forces. The International Federation of Translators, of which the South African Translators' Institute (SATI) is a member, has various projects to raise awareness of these issues and to assist where possible.

At the Federation's World Congress in Berlin at the beginning of August, delegates took a **resolution** calling for the **protection of interpreters and translators in conflict zones**. SATI strongly supports this resolution (reproduced [below](#)) and calls on all in the profession and South African authorities to do all in their power to make sure these rights are upheld. South Africa has troops serving in areas like the Central African Republic and they might also employ local linguists – are we protecting them as we should?

One of the projects to improve the conditions of interpreters working in conflict zones was the development by FIT together with [Red T](#) and the International Association of Conference Interpreters ([AIIC](#)) of a **Conflict Zone Field Guide for Civilian Translators/Interpreters and Users of Their Services**, a document offering guidelines for work in the field. More information and downloads of the guide in various languages are available at <http://www.fit-ift.org/?p=389>. SATI will be adding to the usefulness of this project by working on translations in our official languages as well.

Another important project is the **Open Letter Project**, in which appeals are directed to authorities in relation to specific situations, such as translators who have been imprisoned and local linguists who have been abandoned after troops are withdrawn from areas of conflict like Afghanistan. These letters have already contributed to governments reconsidering their policies and granting asylum to interpreters. More information is available at <http://www.fit-ift.org/?p=394>.

On **International Translation Day 2014**, the South African Translators' Institute acknowledges and lauds the invaluable work done by translators and interpreters in a wide variety of settings. We call on government and the public to give due recognition to this work by using professionals and ensuring that their rights and the rights of their clients are upheld.

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The South African Translators' Institute is a voluntary professional association representing some 800 language practitioners in South Africa

Resolution taken at the XXth World Congress of the International Federation of Translators

Every three years the International Federation of Translators (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs – FIT) invites its members and others from the wider community of translators, terminologists and interpreters across the world to the FIT World Congress. This year's Congress, held in Berlin, Germany, brought together 1 600 participants from over 70 countries to discuss relevant topics and the future of the language industry.

With great concern the Congress participants also considered the situation of those colleagues who undertake their work in conflict zones all over the world. With their dangerous, yet important jobs they guarantee at least a minimum of communication between the otherwise “speechless” parties in the conflict. As linguists committed to impartiality, they build bridges that overcome language and cultural barriers and thus help resolve situations where otherwise only weapons would speak. Yet the services of translators and interpreters lack the recognition they deserve and time and again they are regarded as traitors or collaborators by all the parties involved.

Recognizing the danger and the urgency of their situation, the participants at the XXth FIT World Congress express their support for the resolution adopted by the members of FIT at their statutory congress on 2-3 August 2014 to call upon national governments and the international community to

- protect the local translators and interpreters in conflict zones
- ensure a life in security during and after their work in the conflict zone
- respect the impartiality of the work of translators and interpreters
- work for a UN Convention and/or an international safety document for the protection of translators and interpreters in conflict zones during and after their service

Berlin, 6 August 2014