

Dr Maya Hess (Red T) and Ms Linda Fitchett (AIIC)

Joining forces: The quest for protected-person status for linguists in conflict situations

Translators and interpreters working in conflict zones and other high-risk settings represent one of the most targeted groups around the globe. Hunted down and killed by insurgents, tortured by military regimes, and prosecuted and imprisoned by “free world” countries, they fall through the cracks in the Geneva Conventions as a professional category and are not covered by any United Nations resolution akin to those issued for journalists. Amazingly, there is no international legal text that specifically protects this group. To remedy such a glaring and dangerous omission, Red T, a non-profit organization for linguists at risk, and the five major international language associations – AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters), FIT (International Federation of Translators), IAPTI (International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters), CLI (Critical Link International) and WASLI (World Association of Sign Language Interpreters) – have joined forces in solidarity to seek protected-person status for their vulnerable colleagues.

In this session, Red T’s Maya Hess and AIIC’s Linda Fitchett will outline the current landscape for translators and interpreters in conflict situations as well as introduce the organizations’ primary initiatives such as the Open Letter Project and the publication of safety guidelines to professionalize field linguists. The audience will also learn about efforts to obtain a UN Resolution for the Protection of Civilian Translators/Interpreters in Conflict Situations, lobbying activities, and the vision for the future.