POSITION PAPER

TO: UN System Organisations
               Short-term staff Interpreters of UN System Organisations
FROM: AIIC-UN ND (un@aiic.net); AIIC ExCo (exco@aiic.net)

SUBJECT: DI from home, *in extremis*, temporary guidance until the measures to fight
               the CoVid-19 pandemic are lifted

DATE: 15 April 2020
PLACE: Geneva, Switzerland

Background

The President of AIIC addressed a letter to the international institutions on March 24th or 24 March. In it, he stated: "The global outbreak of Covid-19 constitutes an immense and very acute challenge of unprecedented proportions for all professions, including that of conference interpreting. […] AIIC is committed to weathering this veritable storm we are all bravely facing together. As physical meetings have become an impossibility, videoconferencing technology seems to offer a solution at least for the most urgent of meetings." "In order to help institutions grapple with distance interpreting in these challenging times, AIIC has prepared this set of recommendations specific to the Covid-19 scenario. Needless to say, these recommendations apply to the extraordinary emergency situation your organisations and we as interpreters are having to face right now and in no way claim to be the new standard for our profession, nor for our relationship with organisations. It is a helping hand extended in a time of need."

The letter contained a document with recommendations for distance interpreting (DI) to be used for work *in extremis* from interpreters' own premises until the measures to fight the CoVid-19 pandemic are lifted (pages 9-12).

The 2019 AIIC-UNCEB Agreement does not provide for the possibility for DI '*in extremis* from home' and the only reference to remote/distance interpreting, footnote 5, states that Parties will consult one another on the topic. Moreover, as per studies carried out in 2019 (https://aiic.net/page/8831), the existing platforms do not fully comply with relevant ISO standards, as required under Article 58 of the Agreement. The Technical and Health Committee will conduct a new study in order to establish whether there are RSI platforms that comply with all relevant ISO standards.

Until the measures to fight Covid-19 are lifted and given our commitment to multilingualism in the international arena, it is imperative, as an interim measure, that the possible need to work, *in extremis*, from interpreters' own premises be considered.

Conclusions

AIIC reminds Organisations that modalities of work with interpreters located together should always be preferred over work from home. Interpreting from own premises poses a number of problems and risks, both for the employing Organisation and for the interpreter working remotely. Namely:

- insufficient internet connectivity (on the interpreters' and the speakers' side) resulting in low reception quality on both ends; an interpreter can only interpret what is audible and a listener will only hear what gets through what might be a weak or unstable connection
- confidentiality and security issues due to transmission via the internet
- short-term need for additional costly equipment that is difficult to source during pandemic times. Interpreters will need a second computer to ensure that potentially confidential material on their computers (including speeches and material sent out by the current customer) is safe and to display the RSI platform and documentation as well as terminology applications at the same time (not possible on just one screen)

While the Agreement does not provide for this possibility, following the spirit of the President's letter, the Negotiating Delegation is ready to show a certain degree of flexibility for urgent meetings that cannot be serviced any other way.

Suggested actions

Organisations seeking to use RSI platforms, for work from home *in extremis*, shall make a written request, in advance, to the Negotiating Delegation for the request to be duly considered. The request must justify the impossibility to have interpreters working at the Organisation's premises and the urgent need for the use of such a modality. The request shall also indicate the date, time and venue(s) of the meeting, the number of languages serviced (active/passive) and the platform the Organisation plans to use. The requesting Organisation must follow the guidelines contained in the document "AIIC Recommendations for Institutions (24 March 2020)" and should also bear in mind the following specific conditions for the UN sector:

Temporary guidelines for *in extremis* exceptional and specifically (case-by-case) authorised use of RSI platforms in the UN sector:

Working conditions/remuneration:

To account for additional cognitive load and the risk of connection failures:

- Assignment duration: 2 hours (plus 5-10 minutes grace time). Maximum 2 assignments per day. 2 hours break between assignments. Maximum assignments per contract, as stipulated in Annex H.

- Individual language team: 3 interpreters (exceptionally 2 interpreters at 160% 'petite équipe' rate).

- Short (1 hour maximum) meetings: individual language team of 2 interpreters at Agreement rate.

- Team leader(s): A 'backup' team leader must be appointed to cover any instance where 'main' team leader is unavailable, unreachable or is otherwise impaired from working.

- Equipment: should be provided or paid/rented by Organisation/ RSI platform, especially **dedicated** equipment needed for RSI (including computer, headphones and microphone or headset), since personal equipment of the interpreters needs to be used for having documents on screen and direct contact with boothmate(s), team and technician. Interpreters should not be excluded for work due to technical incapability or other reasons of a technical nature.

- Organisations shall provide interpreters with a disclaimer applicable under relevant law that exempts interpreters working from own premises *in extremis* where no other options are available due to legal or official restrictions from the following:

    The undersigned is hereby exempt from any liability for:
    a) interruption of service;
    b) pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input;
    c) partial or complete loss of audio, audible artefacts;
    d) unauthorized access to personal or confidential data;
    e) leaking of information due to inadequate soundproofing;
    f) data loss.

- Organisations shall recruit locally (at the "usual" venue of this meeting) insofar as possible and from the teams usually called upon.

- Organisations, together with team leaders, shall report back to the AIIC-UN Negotiating Delegation with information regarding the meeting, including, but not limited to:

- Platform used
- Issues encountered
- Solutions applied
- Stress and fatigue, as perceived by the team members.

- A dry run should be held to test equipment, platform and connection before the assignment