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International
Criminal Tribunal
for the former
Yugoslavia

Tribunal Pénal
International pour
l'ex-Yougoslavie

Acceptance Speech for the 2017 Hieronymus Prize

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by

Mr. John Hocking

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Thank you, *Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer*, the German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ) and its President, Mr. André Lindemann.

It is an honour to receive BDÜ's Hieronymus Prize on behalf of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and its Conferences and Language Services Section (CLSS).

With this award, you show that language services translates into the success of an institution; you raise the bar of professional excellence higher and higher; and you promote the vital role of translators and interpreters in today's interconnected world. This is what the language services of the ICTY is all about.

The Mostar Bridge crumbling into pieces at the pounding of shells. The Pearl of the Adriatic burning as rockets light up the sky. We can still see these ghastly images. Throughout the wars, millions were displaced, hundreds of thousands murdered or raped. The ICTY was created to bring about justice in the face of these horrors.

In our courtrooms, we have those most wanted for genocide and war crimes; we have top international lawyers and judges from California to China; we have witnesses, perhaps a mother who lost her son in Srebrenica. And we have the whole world watching. Who brings it all together are those you do not see, but you hear - the interpreters. Up to four languages are spoken in our courtrooms. The interpreters allow the judges to hear the parties, and the parties to hear each other. Every single word goes through them. The justice process unfolds through their voices.

Legal translation is already challenging, in high profile international criminal trials it is even more so. Any actor in the courtroom can question each translated word. A former military officer, for example, might admonish that the English word "commander" doesn't accurately reflect the different positions of "komandant" and "komandir" in Bosnian/ Croatian/ Serbian. You can't get more intense scrutiny, but we welcome this scrutiny. Serving the needs of our clients, better and better, that is what made the ICTY language services outstanding. The ICTY simultaneous interpretation rated as 98% accurate, according to a recent analysis.

Nearly 80,000 interpreter days. One million pages translated. And a terminology database which ensures consistency throughout. It lists countless abbreviations, regional variances of the names of the most remote villages, and words like "osa", literally a wasp, but in our trials a hand-held anti-tank rocket launcher. The variety of the language services' work is immense - from deciphering handwritten Cyrillic to translating the most excruciating forensic details, such as how long it takes for fly eggs to hatch into larva so as to estimate the time of death.

Maja Ružić, the Chief of CLSS, and her team, which numbered some 150 colleagues at the peak of the Tribunal's court activity, have achieved excellence. But they are not just excellent professionals, they are courageous women and men. They returned home from investigations, frantically trying to wash away the smell of death from mass graves. Impassively, they interpreted the lawyer questioning the rape, and then the response of the victim, with her broken words and painful emotions. But as they gave voice to the victims, they also lent their voice to alleged war criminals. This voice is broadcast around world, and in the minds of many becomes the voice of a killer.

Many of our language staff come from the former Yugoslavia. Some have themselves witnessed the wars. Some have translated about massacres and rapes in their own towns. Yet they have remained impartial, they have preserved utmost professional integrity. When I am asked if they have bias, I respond: yes, they have bias for justice.

For the first time in history, we celebrate International Translation Day, in which we recognise the vital work of language professionals for peace. With the prestigious Hieronymus Prize, you have awarded a language department which has been instrumental for the delivery of justice for war crimes. As the ICTY completes its work and closes its doors this December, I hope that the technical and moral legacy of our language professionals will continue to inspire translators and interpreters across the world to become even better agents of intercultural dialogue and peace.

Thank you.
