

International Translation Day
26 September 2018, 6:30 p.m.

**Transcript of the remarks by Cecilia Elizalde
Director, Documentation Division,
on behalf of Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General
for General Assembly and Conference Management
and Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues in the language professions

It is an honour for me to deliver a few words today as part of the celebrations of International Translation Day on behalf of Catherine Pollard, who serves as UN Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism and heads the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management where translators – in the wide sense of this term – work.

Our department, which operates worldwide, in four different duty stations, is one of the largest employers of language professionals in the world. In addition to interpreters and translators we also have in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, revisers, editors, verbatim reporters, copy-preparers, and text-processors to whom I also wish to pay tribute today as we celebrate International Translation Day.

There is probably no better time than today to capture the essential role that language professionals play in ensuring the proper functioning of the parliamentary processes in a large international organization like the United Nations.

Last year, during the general debate of the General Assembly, 26 different languages were spoken in the General Assembly Hall, and simultaneous interpretation into the six official languages of the UN was provided to ensure that all Member States participate in the proceedings on an equal footing.

Also last year, our department translated nearly 240 million words from and into different sets of languages. This was made possible by our skilful and relentless colleagues, who work under strict quality and productivity standards, sometimes under impossible deadlines, to provide the necessary operating conditions for our multilateral system.

One of the facts that are oftentimes unknown about translating at the United Nations is that it requires much more than mastering two or three languages. Just like knowing how to write does not make you an author, knowing languages does not make you a translator, especially not at the UN, where translation is required to comply with terminological guidelines, be coherent with all set precedents, consistent across languages in addition to being faithful to the original text.

Language professionals at the UN, with whom I have the honour to work on a daily basis, are the genuine “unsung heroes of this Organization” to use your words, Mister Deputy Foreign Minister Dapkiunas, and play an indispensable role not only in documenting the United Nations, but also in making sure the agreements reached are properly recorded on paper, and ultimately, in building the collective memory of this Organization, for the benefit of the generations to come.

For the record I myself started my career here as a translator, and I am proud to represent the profession here now. On behalf of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all the organizers of this exhibition and the co-sponsors of the General Assembly resolution on the role of professional translation in connecting nations and fostering peace, understanding and development. Your continued commitment to our profession is commendable and greatly appreciated by all of us.

Thank you.