

## MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION AT WFP MEETINGS

The professional delegation of the conference interpreters servicing the meetings of the three United Nations agencies based in Rome extends a warm welcome to the new members of the WFP Executive Board.

We would like to take advantage of this briefing session to draw your attention to ways and means that can improve communication in a multilingual environment.

Interpreters are communication professionals as well as linguists. In order to ensure accuracy in conveying your message to those listening to you we need your collaboration in several ways:

- Documentation  
Interpreters need to prepare for meetings. It is therefore important for us to receive advance copy of any and all pertinent documentation through the secretariat. By being able to share your cognitive input we will be in a position to speak your 'language' in all the working languages of a meeting!
- Use of microphones  
Microphones are indispensable and exacting tools. Please never forget that:
  - taking the floor without turning on the microphone means you will not be heard by those who do not understand the language in which you are speaking;
  - to make sure your microphone is operational check and see whether the red indicator light at the top of the microphone neck is turned on. When in doubt do not hesitate to ask if you can be heard, but please never knock on the microphone itself (that is detrimental to the equipment, and even more so to the eardrums of interpreters!);
  - it is essential for interpreters to hear you as clearly as possible. A microphone turned to your right or left, or literally glued to your lips produces distorted sound and makes you close to inaudible. The ideal would be for the microphone to be pointing directly towards you at a distance of around 30 cm from your mouth;
  - earphones and microphones don't like one another and produce an irritating Larsen effect. When removing your earphones upon taking the floor do not place them close to the microphone; the same principle applies for mobile phones, which, even when set on silent mode, can create electronic interference and make you impossible to hear;
  - any microphone left on when not being used is a source of acoustic interference; when you have finished speaking remember to turn off the microphone. The next speaker will be most grateful to you.
- Reading statements prepared beforehand  
A speaker reading a prepared text always goes faster than someone speaking without a text. Any text read by a speaker (whether long or short, policy-related or technical, printed or handwritten) can be conveyed with all nuances of meaning only if the interpreters are able to read the text at the same time as the reader and sight translate it into the various working languages. In requesting you to provide advance copies of prepared statements we would also recall that an interpreter is bound to professional secrecy and that our hearing, independent from our sight, will grasp any last minute changes you may decide to make to your statement (i.e. check against delivery).
- Respect the lapse factor  
During a discussion taking place through interpretation it is advisable to allow for and respect a slight pause between one speaker and another (a few seconds) in order to wait for the end of interpretation into all working languages. All listeners are thereby able to react at the same time, whether they have listened to the speaker in the same language or through interpretation.
- Working languages  
Interpreters are trained to reproduce what you say with all the spontaneity you put into your words. Take advantage of their presence and skills by speaking in the working language with which you feel most at ease.

In closing, rest assured that you can count on our full collaboration for the optimal communication of your proceedings. Please do not hesitate to bring to our attention any concerns you may have, and we will strive to attend to them.