The AIIC Malintzin prize 2009

Mr. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, former Foreign Minister of Germany, assiduously promoted the use of languages in international discourse. In the opening ceremony of the 2009 AIIC Assembly in Nice (France)

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AIIC created the Malintzin Prize in 2005 as an award to be given every three years to honor prominent individuals who have actively promoted the profession of conference interpreting. It is named after Malintzin - also known as Doña Marina - a Nahau woman who became the interpreter of Hernán Cortés after the Conquistadors arrived in Mexico. Malintzin was the first interpreter recorded in history and consequently AIIC has chosen her as a symbol of the transformation of this age-old activity into an internationally recognised profession.

The inaugural winner of the AIIC Malintzin Prize is Mr. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German Foreign Minister and Deputy Chancellor for nearly twenty years before his retirement from political life in 1998. Throughout his long career Mr. Genscher worked indefatigably for European cooperation; he was instrumental in launching the EU's common foreign and security policy and in creating European monetary union, and was one of the main players in the events leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The expansion of the European Union has gone hand-in-hand with active promotion of and respect for European languages. The provision of high quality translation and interpretation allows each individual to speak his or her mother tongue, secure in the knowledge that what is said will be faithfully rendered in other languages. Active in political life and on the European and global diplomatic stage at the highest level, Mr. Genscher summarises his support for this approach: "In a foreign language I say what I can. In my own language I say what I want."

It would be hard to express more succinctly the right of each person to use his own language, the trust thereby placed in interpreters and the fact that using interpreters contributes to the quality of communication in all settings and at all levels. The assembled profession has thus awarded Mr. Genscher the AIIC Malintzin Prize in tribute to his steadfast commitment to interpreting and interpreters.

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