Dear Colleagues,

It is indeed a great honour to be elected as President of our Association. I am deeply moved and thank you for the confidence you have shown me.

I accept the position of President of AIIC with humility because it is not an easy task and I am certain that despite my best efforts, I will disappoint some of you some times. La charge est d'autant plus difficile à accepter, car il n'est pas de défi plus grand à relever que d'être successeur de Malick Sy. In the 28 years that I have been a member of this Association and actively involved in many of its activities, I have found again and again that meetings of interpreters are the most difficult to steer. We conference interpreters are good at talking; we must become better at listening. If we do so, we will find our tasks easier, our relations improved, our achievements enhanced.

Over the past few years AIIC has faced great challenges and has survived them well. We faced the FTC challenge and we won! We have faced increasing "deregulation" and have managed to preserve our unity and our basic standards. We have made enormous strides in improving the running of our Secretariat and the services we offer our members and the public:

- We have computerised the whole Secretariat and its functions;
- We have negotiated agreements with major employers, the most recent being with the EU;
- We have set up a very good website;
- We have launched an on-line magazine;
- We have improved the presentation and content of the AIIC Bulletin;
- We have started the ball rolling on an international form of recognition of our profession;
- We have maintained relations with other bodies of the conference industry;
- We have reached out to colleagues in Eastern and Central Europe;
- We have carried out numerous training activities for members and non-members;
- We have continued to maintain contact with many interpreters schools;
- We have worked with ISO on a revision of interpretation equipment and booth standards;
- We have worked with several international projects and organisations on remote conferencing and videoconferencing;
- We have produced PR materials and participated in several conference industry events.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels. As we ourselves repeat at so many conferences, we are
living in an interdependent and rapidly changing world, a world in which information and communication technologies are constantly evolving and creating new environments, new standards, new kinds of interaction, new behaviours and new forms of competition. All of this affects our profession and the conference industry most profoundly.

In order to be truthful to the goals that we have set ourselves in our statutes, namely:
- to set the standards of our profession
- to represent our profession
- to improve our profession
- to safeguard the interests of our members
- to serve international cooperation

we must adapt to our present world, to new working environments, to new work partners, to new interlocutors, to new technologies - in short to new ways of doing. We cannot simply ignore or try to oppose the changes that are occurring in the conference industry, whether that is in international organisations or on the private market.

VISION

Dear Colleagues, allow me to put to you some of my ideas or my vision for the future of AIIC:

First: AIIC should remain what it is: the only worldwide professional association of conference interpreters; the point of reference for conference interpretation, regarded and respected as such by interpreters and by our main partners.

Second: AIIC should continue to be the collective bargaining partner with major employers, without that role absorbing a disproportionate amount of its time and resources. We are and must continue to be respected by international organisations as the professional association of conference interpreters. Our numbers are small compared to the many thousands of civil servants who work for international organisations. If we put ourselves in the place of these organisations we will see that we are just a small bother in the overall scheme of things. But not if we act as the professional association that commands respect because it upholds its standards and defends quality and the interests of the profession. We should not see our self-adopted deregulation as a calamity and our collective agreements with international organisations as the only salvation because they contain a negotiated fee. We must negotiate with these organisations because we are the representative body of all conference interpreters.

Third: AIIC should be at the front of the linguistic developments resulting from the enlargement of the European Union, not only towards Eastern Europe but the world. The EU is meeting increasingly with its Eastern and Central European partners, but also with its Asian partners, particularly China, Japan and Korea. And in the wake of the EU, so is the private sector. AIIC should embark on a "New Multilingualism" project that involves several committees, e.g. CECO, Training, Staff Interpreters, Technical and Health, Private Market Sector and so forth. The enlargement has consequences for many aspects of our work and working conditions: the way we practice interpretation, from C and B to A languages, the number of pivot booths, the hours worked, the number of booths and languages used at a conference, the quality standards we uphold, etc. If AIIC is not proactive and is not seen to be proactive in this area, others will be there before we are and will dictate the way our profession will operate. We must have something to contribute, so that we are looked upon as the experts and trendsetters in our profession. Council should work with all members of the Association who are willing to give some of their time, their knowledge and their energy, be they members of a committee or not.
Fourth: AIIC should continue to be strongly involved in the evaluation and standardisation of new conference technologies, particularly videoconferencing, so that as they evolve they integrate the concerns and requirements of interpreters. We should not let ourselves be shut out of these developments or sidelined by them.

Fifth: AIIC should make greater efforts to get as many interpreter schools as possible to accept certain minimum standards, both for admission of students and for qualification of interpreters. There is an increasing need to use objective criteria for admission to AIIC and the first of those is an interpreter's diploma; that in turn requires a system of accreditation or classification of schools.

Sixth: AIIC should continue to enhance its information and public relations work, mainly through the website, but also through high quality documents and through participation at industry events, as well as by organising events, such as meetings with chief interpreters.

Seventh: AIIC needs to put more efforts into its project for the definition and recognition of our profession by an international convention. Members in many regions should mobilize their governments to support the idea of an international convention.

Eighth: To provide a scientific basis for the health arguments that underpin our working conditions, AIIC must pursue independent research on workload and other elements that impact on an interpreter's performance and health. Research is another activity that enhances our image as a professional association.

Ninth: To serve its members better and more efficiently, with the same resources as at present, AIIC must continue to increasingly use advanced information and communication technologies. The AIIC website should eventually become the preferred interface for members and public who seek information about AIIC, about themselves or other members, about conference technologies, tips, etc.

Tenth: AIIC should streamline its admission procedures, without diluting its quality criteria. This entails not only using modern technology, but also requires that members seek to encourage interpreters to join the Association, to brief them on what membership means and explain why the strength and unity of our profession benefits all interpreters.

Eleventh: AIIC should continue to help members improve and market their skills. We should organise more seminars on how to sell our services, on what our clients expect from interpretation, on how to negotiate with clients, on explaining the value of intercultural and multilingual communication at conferences, on using the Internet, etc.

THE FUTURE

To achieve all or part of these ideas, we need to have three things:

- A lean, efficient and representative structure;
- An efficient and modern Secretariat;
- Involvement of members in projects and activities.

STRUCTURE

The time has come to review our present structures. There has been too much stress in the past on representation of interests and geographical numbers without sufficient care about the outcome. We need to focus our structures on output. We need to make more effective and efficient use of our resources. This Assembly has given Council a mandate to present to the next Assembly, on the basis
of all the proposals that have been made in the past, a new structure for AIIC that is:

- task-oriented and accountable to the membership;
- less cumbersome, leaner and can act more rapidly;
- that represents all sectors of our profession to the best possible degree;
- that is more efficient and output-oriented.

SECRETARIAT

We already have a very good Secretariat under the able leadership of our Executive Secretary. I pay tribute to Josyane Cristina and the small team of dedicated staff who have managed to successfully introduce a new computerised management system. All the repetitive tasks of processing membership growth and change, of providing documents and preparing meetings are now competently handled by an in-house computerised information system.

But this streamlined Secretariat can only function effectively if all of us, members and elected officers of the Association, do our part by gradually providing all the information in electronic format so that it can be handled almost automatically by the system now set up at the Secretariat. This will free staff time so that the Secretariat can also support project activity. We don't all have to be information systems experts, but we all need to provide information to our Association in such a way that it can readily be used and disseminated. This is necessary so that information can circulate and we can overcome the almost constant complaint that members are not informed.

PROJECT ORIENTATION

The time has come for AIIC to pull its efforts and its resources together and concentrate on well-selected projects with clear objectives and deadlines; projects that interest a sufficient number of members, so that volunteers come forward for them. Each project could operate with a leader or a rotating leadership and a number of dedicated members who volunteer to do specific tasks, for a certain time. Each project should have a clear goal, a set of realisable objectives, a series of activities within specific time limits, and a deadline for completion. And each project should be evaluated on its output and the value added for members and for the profession.

This does not mean that we should scrap all our committees and working groups. But their mandate must be clear to their members, as well as to the membership. A committee's mandate may well include a project or more. But each project should ideally involve others in addition to some or all of the committee members. Committees must cease to exist in order to hold statutory meetings. Meetings should become instruments to achieve goals and be held only when necessary.

I believe we should restructure our Programme and Budget, so that we no longer look at figures for committees and working groups, but at figures for activities and projects. The budget should be articulated in such a way that most funds are divided among activities, some of which may involve more than one committee or working group. If we get away from this committee-centred way of looking at problems and finances and concentrate instead on project-centred output-oriented activities, we will avoid many difficult and time-consuming conflicts and will find that members are more eager to join in projects.

L'AVENIR

Voilà donc, chers collègues, ma vision de l'avenir de notre Association. Une Association vivante, active, insérée dans le monde d'aujourd'hui ; une Association qui regroupe tous les interprètes de conférence professionnels, sur la base de leurs compétences et non pas de leurs amitiés ou leurs relations. Une Association qui regarde vers l'avenir plus que vers le passé, avec sérénité et confiance
dans sa capacité à faire respecter les normes professionnelles qu'elle s'est donnée. Une Association qui incite ses membres à participer à ses activités et à des non-membres à adhérer.

Je ne suis pas iconoclaste et je ne rejette pas nos acquis ni l'œuvre de nos prédécesseurs. Au contraire, j'estime que nous avons un passé glorieux, que nous avons construit une belle profession, grâce au dévouement de nombreux membres, depuis les fondateurs jusqu'à nos jours. Nous devons construire notre avenir sur ce passé, sur cet acquis, ces forces vives. Et nous en sommes capables, à la condition de rester unis, de tenir toujours à l'esprit l'intérêt commun, ce qui rassemble tous les interprètes de conférence, en évitant les querelles de clocher ; nous y parviendrons en nous rappelant ce qui nous a fait adhérer à notre Association, en revenant au but et aux missions de notre Association toute entière, à ce qui nous unit, plutôt qu'à ce qui pourrait à l'occasion nous diviser.

L'enquête sur les souhaits des interprètes, réalisée par l'AIIC en 1999, nous a donné certaines indications assez claires sur ce que les interprètes attendent d'une association professionnelle comme la nôtre. Nous avons l'avantage de pouvoir maintenant nous servir d'instruments nouveaux de communication et de travail qui facilitent et accélèrent bon nombre de tâches, ce qui nous laisse du temps disponible pour nous consacrer à des œuvres communes.

Chers collègues, nous avons entamé une nouvelle ère, un nouveau siècle et un nouveau millénaire. Le monde n'est plus ce qu'il était il y a 50 ou 40 ans, lorsque notre profession s'est donnée ses normes et ses règles. Nous devons nous adapter aux nouvelles formes de travail, aux nouveaux modes de communication, aux nouvelles techniques et aux nouvelles conditions politiques et sociales. Ce qui fait tourner le monde d'aujourd'hui, ce sont les nouvelles techniques d'information et de communication. Elles bouleversent complètement les modes de production et par conséquent les rapports de force entre différents secteurs de la société. D'une part, les Etats perdent en partie leurs pouvoirs ; de l'autre, les entreprises s'agrandissent et s'internationalisent. Tout cela a des conséquences sur les conférences dans lesquelles nous sommes appelés à interpréter, mais aussi sur le genre d'interlocuteurs que nous avons en face de nous. Nous sommes de plus en plus confrontés à des gestionnaires de projets et non plus à des organisateurs de conférence ou des collègues interprètes mandatés pour recruter une équipe d'interprètes. Il faut que nous nous adaptions à ces nouvelles réalités, pour faire survivre et rehausser la valeur de notre profession.

C'est pourquoi j'estime qu'il est tellement important que l'AIIC soit une association moderne, qu'elle travaille avec des instruments et des techniques modernes et qu'elle soit ouverte au monde des nouvelles technologies, au risque de dépérir. C'est pourquoi j'estime que nous devons consacrer moins de temps et de ressources à des organes et des structures, et davantage à des activités et des produits qui intéressent nos membres, particulièrement les plus jeunes qui, eux, grandissent dans un monde nouveau et avec des instruments nouveaux. Nous ne devons pas pour autant négliger les intérêts et les souhaits de nos membres les plus anciens, ni de ceux pour qui les nouveaux instruments de communication posent parfois des difficultés. Mais nous ne devons pas non plus courir le risque de rater le train du nouveau siècle et de rester une association de nostalgiques, campés sur la gloire du passé. Surtout si nous voulons attirer de nouveaux interprètes et assurer la relève.

Je lance un appel à tous ceux qui se sont tenus en marge des activités de l'Association à se porter volontaires pour contribuer à l'édification de notre avenir. Je vous invite à proposer des activités, à vous associer à des groupes de travail ou des projets et à inviter vos amis et connaissances dans la profession à faire de même. L'avenir est à ceux qui saisissent leur chance, à ceux qui agissent et non pas à ceux qui restent sur la touche.

Je compte sur vous tous et je vous remercie encore une fois de votre confiance.

Vive l'AIIC du nouveau millénaire !
Recommended citation format: