



ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES INTERPRÈTES DE CONFÉRENCE  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS

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## **Public Services postpones automated conference interpretation procurement system**

Ottawa – Public Services and Procurement Canada has delayed yet again the roll out of a new automated procurement system for Official Languages conference interpretation services and parliamentary interpretation services, a move that doesn't go far enough according to professional conference interpreters.

A September 7 deadline for accredited freelance interpreters contracted by the federal Translation Bureau to respond to a Request for Standing Offer has been bumped back to September 29, 2016.

“This system will do more harm than good when it comes to Canadians’ access to the proceedings of the federal government in the language of their choice,” said Nicole Gagnon, spokesperson for the Canadian chapter of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC Canada). “The entire project should be put on hold until the government has had a chance to respond to the recommendations of a parliamentary committee that just recommended sweeping change to the way the Translation Bureau should be managed,” Gagnon continued.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages has just finished a comprehensive study and recommended eight significant changes to the Translation Bureau. The government has until mid-October to respond.

In February 2014, Public Services and Procurement Canada launched a complete overhaul of the Conference Interpretation Service (CIS) and Parliamentary Interpretation Service (PIS) procurement process. Put forward by the same department that is responsible for the Phoenix pay system and the Portage automated translation tool, the new procurement system is scheduled to come into effect within weeks, even though problems besetting its design and implementation have forced multiple delays. The new system:

- Entrenches the Translation Bureau’s lowest bid orientation aimed at cutting costs rather than sustaining quality and places the procurement of conference interpretation on par with that of widgets even though conference interpretation is a service and a highly specialized one at that;

- Sets the stage for the elimination or watering down of the world-class entrance requirements and accreditation for interpreters who do this important work (some entrance requirements for written translation services have already been watered down, while others have been eliminated). Some market-oriented corporate operators in the language industry are lobbying to remove the Translation Bureau from the accreditation business altogether. Since no other certification in Canada can match it, interpreter standards and qualifications would decline as a result;
- Renders the Conference Interpretation Service and the Parliamentary Interpretation Service voiceless in the procurement of interpretation services even though they are undeniably the experts in what is needed, replacing them with an automated system that will award contracts based on lowest bid among freelancers or companies on a standing offer list. Lost in the procurement process will be the guarantee that interpreters most familiar with the subject at hand do the job. And, because work contracts will not be awarded until the last minute, travel and related costs will increase; and
- Creates a fictitious hierarchy amongst conference events based on the high ranking of officials in attendance, to which only a selected group of accredited interpreters will be exclusively assigned. This opens the door to staffing the rest of the events with whole teams of less experienced interpreters, possibly non-accredited, thus relegating those events to lower-quality service.

“Lowest bid is fine for stationery supplies or car leases, but Canada’s official languages are much too important to allow a lowest bid procurement system to undercut quality and the Translation Bureau’s important role in guaranteeing Canadians their constitutional right to use and be served in the language of their choice,” Gagnon said.

AIIC was founded in 1953. It includes close to 3,000 members worldwide, in 89 countries and 23 AIIC regions. AIIC Canada members work in Canada and in other parts of the world, but their most important client is the Translation Bureau that provides parliamentary and conference interpretation services in both Official Languages and Foreign Languages. For over 60 years, AIIC has promoted high standards of quality and ethics, and worked for the benefit of all conference interpreters and for the profession as a whole.

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