

FAO Field Days

By Jonathan Clements

The FAO Interpretation Group provides conference interpreters for a significant number of field meetings every year. From Addis Ababa to Astana, from Tenerife to Tegucigalpa, each mission raises its own challenges in terms of identifying quality interpreters as close to the venue as possible and resolving logistical issues, such as visas, travel, accommodation and even cash, when other payment systems are non-operational. One aspect essential to the success of an international meeting is the simultaneous interpretation equipment. Certain basic requirements which may seem obvious to those in the business are often not met, for example a sufficient number of booths for all languages, a clear view of the proceedings or even an adequate air supply. In over 20 years of missions, I have observed that such problems may occur regardless of the country or city where the meeting is held. They are difficult to resolve on the spot and can delay the start of the meeting. It is for this reason that I established a simple ten-point Interpretation Equipment Check-list (see below) which the Interpretation Group communicates systematically to all meeting organizers for verification with the equipment supplier before the meeting. The full technical requirements for built-in simultaneous interpretation booths are set out in ISO Standard 2603:2016 and for mobile booths in ISO Standard 4043:2016. My experience shows however that the Check-list is usually sufficient to ensure no major hiccups:

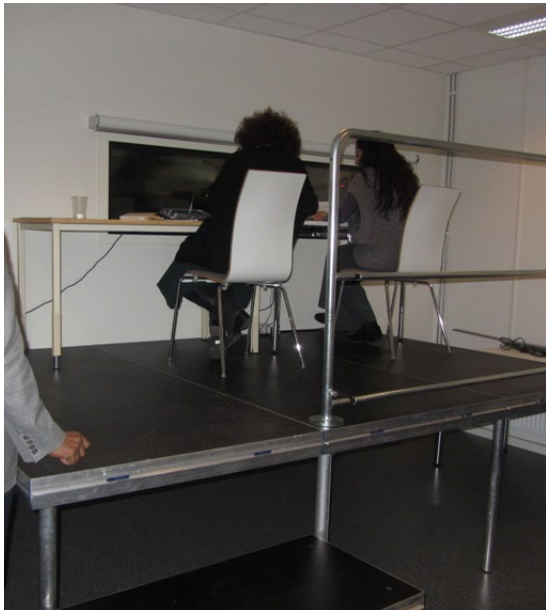
- 1. There must be one booth for each language used in the meeting, e.g. 6 languages = 6 booths. ❖**
- 2. The booths must have a clear view of the whole room. Mobile booths must be placed on a raised platform (25-30 cm high).**
- 3. The screen in the room must be easily legible from all the booths, otherwise monitors must be provided in each booth.**
- 4. Each interpreter must have an individual console (with microphone, headset, controls).**
- 5. Each booth must accommodate 2 interpreters seated comfortably.**
- 6. The Arabic and Chinese booths should be large enough to accommodate 3 interpreters. The consoles must allow other outgoing channels to be selected, i.e. so that an Arabic interpreter can interpret not only into Arabic but also from Arabic into English, French or Spanish and so that a Chinese interpreter can interpret into Chinese but also from Chinese into English or French.**
- 7. Table lamps must be provided to allow interpreters to read texts or take notes when the room lights are dimmed or off.**
- 8. Each booth must have adequate ventilation, as doors need to be kept closed during the meeting.**
- 9. The installation must be completed the day before the meeting to allow the team-leader to check the equipment and resolve any problems.**
- 10. The equipment supplier's technician must be present in the vicinity of the booths throughout the conference.**

❖ **For two-language meetings where all interpreters are working into and from both languages e.g. English into French and French into English, a single booth is sufficient.**

I am more than happy for any interpreter colleagues, recruiters or meeting organizers to make use of this Check-list, in the hope that it will contribute to the smooth provision of interpretation services and a successful meeting (also avoiding situations like those pictured below...).

Jonathan Clements is Officer-in-Charge of the Interpretation Group at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



Photographs courtesy of Blandine Jeanne, FAO Staff Interpreter

