On the occasion of the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and given the impossibility of my being present at the inaugural session of your assembly, I wish to publicly express my appreciation for the work done by the members of AIIC.

The history of the profession of interpreting, whose origins date back to the reference to Babel in the Book of Genesis, is intertwined with that of humanity and invokes the most intimate and personal human skill – man’s ability to communicate through the spoken word, albeit in different languages.

From time immemorial, the development of relations between peoples, peace negotiations and declarations of war, the establishment of commercial exchanges, the drafting of treaties and the conclusion of negotiations have necessitated the invaluable intervention of interpreters and translators.

Interpreting, an extremely difficult and exacting profession demanding absolute accuracy, provides a means of communication between two or more individuals whose lack of a common language would otherwise condemn them to silence and mutual seclusion. It is an admirable profession, one that is increasingly necessary in a globalised world in which we endeavour to preserve the riches of a varied linguistic heritage and to uphold the worth of universal communication.

If we are to safeguard linguistic and cultural diversity without compromising the development of relations between peoples, we must promote multilinguism and the training of good professionals, translators and interpreters, who can perform their jobs effectively, even with distinction, and meet high standards of quality.

Portuguese, one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, has become increasingly significant at the large multilateral meetings of the international community in which Lusophone countries participate. I believe that your decision to celebrate this important anniversary in Portugal also reflects that fact.

I wish you full success in your deliberations and, for all, a happy stay in Portugal.

President of the Portuguese Republic, Dr. Jorge Sampaio
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