

# Geopolitical Instability and the Value of Multilingualism

## 13 June 2025

*Symposium of the Study Group on Language and the United Nations*

The world is experiencing what many are calling a *polycrisis* precipitated by climate change, geopolitical conflicts, political instability, social inequalities, economic challenges, misinformation, environmental degradation, health emergencies, and more. It would be easy in this time of turmoil to dismiss multilingualism as a minor concern and distraction—a luxury we cannot afford or simply a low priority until the world has other crises under control.

Focusing on the essential role that multilingualism plays in multilateralism, peace, and shared understanding, especially in times of geopolitical crisis, this virtual half-day symposium brings together stakeholders, including United Nations staff members, government officials, university scholars, and members of civil society, to address the value of multilingualism in practice.

In collaboration with



Por lingva justeco en multkultura mondo  
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**CLPP** Consortium for Language Policy and Planning



Online | Register [Here](#) by 12 June 2025



08:30-12:00 – New York  
15:30-19:00 – Nairobi

14:30-18:00 – Geneva  
19:30-23:00 – Bangkok

# Geopolitical Instability and the Value of Multilingualism

The world is experiencing what many are calling a *polycrisis* precipitated by climate change, geopolitical conflicts, political instability, social inequalities, economic challenges, misinformation, environmental degradation, health emergencies, and more. It would be easy in this time of turmoil to dismiss multilingualism as a minor concern and distraction—a luxury we cannot afford or simply a low priority until the world has other crises under control.

Yet, it is through language that we understand our world, create and share knowledge, and communicate with one another. The only way we can address the world's current problems is through meaningful dialogue about solutions.

In a polycrisis, we must seek *polysolutions* like multilingual communication. Linguistic diversity brings with it a diversity of people and ideas from communities across the globe. How can we ensure that they are all included and that no possibilities are missed or voices unheard simply because of a lack of language capacity?

The present symposium draws attention to the value of multilingualism for the United Nations, Member States, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in light of the confluence of contemporary geopolitical crises.

## Objectives

This symposium focuses on the importance and often neglected role of multilingualism in bringing about and sustaining geopolitical stability. Attention will be given to discussions of global communications, including advances in technology and language services (interpretation and translation); multilingual education and literacies; and the role of civil society in supporting multilingualism. The objectives of the symposium are:

1. To discuss the role of languages in addressing current geopolitical challenges.
2. To address the affordances and constraints of new technologies and their application in the work of language services, discussing how technological and civil partnerships may contribute globally to “peace, justice and strong institutions” (SDG 16).
3. To emphasize the importance of multilingual education and multiliteracies based on learners' own languages for “quality education” (SDG 4) and long-term global stability.
4. To facilitate dialogue among leaders of the United Nations, member states, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders in order to foster deeper understanding of the role of language in tackling global crises and advancing innovative solutions in support of SDG 4, 16 and 17.

# Programme

Friday, 13 June 2025

## 08:30-08:40 **Opening and Welcome**

*Prof. Humphrey Tonkin*, Chair, Study Group on Language and the United Nations

*Prof. Francis M. Hult*, Chair, NGO Committee on Language and Languages

## 08:40-08:50 **Featured Speaker**

*H.E. Mr. Michel Xavier Biang*

Permanent Observer for the International Organization of la Francophonie to the United Nations

## 08:50-09:30 **Dialogue Session 1: Multilingual Education**

*Ms. Bodiel Fall*, Coordinator of program École et Langues Nationales (ELAN), Institut de la Francophonie pour l'éducation et la formation (IFEF), Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

*Mr. Mamadou Ly*, Executive Director, Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED), Dakar, Senegal

*Dr. Youssouf Haidara*, Linguist and Multilingual Education Expert, Bamako, Mali

*Moderated by Dr. Erina Iwasaki*, University of Notre Dame

## 09:30-09:40 Break

## 09:40-10:20 **Dialogue Session 2: Technology and Language Services**

*Ms. Sibongile Khoza*, PhD candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, and Head of Hansard in the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature

*Ms. Irina Paramonova*, International Association of Conference Interpreters, Conference Interpreter

*Mr. Raphaël Toussaint*, Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, Translator/Terminologist

*Moderated by Dr. Alice Leal*, University of the Witwatersrand

## 10:20-11:00 **Dialogue Session 3: Civil Society**

*Dr. Diep Nguyen*, President, Center for Applied Linguistics

*Moderated by Prof. Humphrey Tonkin and Prof. Rosemary Salomone*, Study Group on Language and the United Nations

## 11:10-11:50 **Dialogue Session 4: Global Communications**

*Ms. Mita Hosali*, Deputy Director of the United Nations News and Media Division

*Moderated by Prof. Francis M. Hult and Prof. Lisa McEntee-Atalianis*, Study Group on Language and the United Nations

## 11:50-12:00 Concluding Remarks

*Dr. Carol Benson, Prof. Francis M. Hult, Prof. Lisa McEntee-Atalianis, Prof. Rosemary Salomone, and Prof. Humphrey Tonkin*