

## Speech conference Apostolat Militaire National

13d of September

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Antwerp, and to the Province House. It is a pleasure to see all these people from different countries and continents gathered here. Throughout history, **Antwerp** has always been a **meeting place for international contacts**: a stimulating place for creative and innovative ideas and the top address for exchanging them. And **its assets** have remained the same: our **central location** with a well-developed international port, Antwerp's openness and **accessibility**. These trump cards are combined with a great **quality of life**, our **rich culture** and **high standard education**.

No wonder that we feel very strong about **promoting intercultural exchange**. Building bridges between the different nations and nationalities, resulting in a warmer, more open and tolerant society. A more peaceful society. We all can **benefit from a multicultural society**. Knowledge, insights and valuable experiences can be exchanged. A multicultural society contributes to a sharpening of a whole range of perspectives and angles, thus promoting creativity and innovation. Boldness, a good dose of empathy, mutual respect and positive commitment and engagement are key ingredients for success. Being exposed to multiple views and cultures enables us to respond better to the complexities of a globalised world.

These **key ingredients are also present at the AMI-organisation and its goals**: you are busy promoting and supporting international understanding and cooperation as a contribution to strengthening the peace in the world. Based upon Christian views, values and insights, in a military context.

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning," wise words that Albert Einstein once shared with the world. It is **necessary and vital that people come together to discuss about delicate matters**, like military relations in modern society, or being religious in the military.

A **clear set of values and ethics** can and must be an excellent basis for giving meaning to the special ethical responsibilities that the soldier is forced to bear. Although military interventions are evolving into more humanitarian, less combat-oriented interventions, the **risks of being confronted with injuries or death** are **always present**. Risks for being killed or injured themselves. But they might also have other contact with injury, death, fear and suffering: among their own colleagues, other military forces, or even among innocent civilians. It is clear that giving meaning in a military context is far from self-evident, but at the same time very essential and necessary.

When I take a look at your organisation and its objectives, at the program and the treated topics of this conference, I have to conclude that it is good and worthwhile that people are offered a forum where they can meet and exchange views.

During the past days, participants from different backgrounds were offered the opportunity to **share positive experiences**, and at the same time, **critique and debate** were stimulated. This conference may well be the result of great effort –for which I would like to thank the organising parties- it must not be a finishing point, but rather a momentum for the interchange of experiences, new concepts and ideas, an impulse for brainstorming.

Ladies and gentlemen,

**Being in the military calls for many sacrifices:** being away from home and family for long periods of time, working conditions that can be quite stressful and even dangerous, particularly during times of deployment. For an outsider, it is difficult to get a clear and realistic picture of what it is like. But **my appreciation and respect** for you all is enormous. Like Albert Pike once stated: “What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.”

During the past days, you proved your ability to communicate about difficult yet crucial issues, and your ability to enhance common values. I hope that **the conference days were inspiring and enriching**, and that **you enjoyed your stay in our province**. I wish you all the best of luck for the years ahead.