

APOSTOLAT MILITAIRE INTERNATIONAL

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Opening Remarks Handover of the Presidency

Because of self-explaining reasons this report will not cover a period of only one year. I would like to refer to the timeframe from 1999 on, then from 2001 on and will try to draw some conclusions.

The world is changing dramatically and the role of the soldier, too. This was covered in detail during the past conferences, especially during the last one in Erfurt. The direction of this change is obvious; it is the soldier who is able to fulfil his task in a multifaceted environment, often without an enemy, but with many counterparts, with flexibility and the capacity of adaptation.

The paramount question is how, with what kind of spirit, the soldier of all ranks tackles with the new demands. The deployment-scenarios for these new demands are the civil war and the global political violence, especially the phenomenon of terrorism in the 21st century. Sure, for many politicians a handy soldier would be the most convenient one. "No question, only execution". But from a more distanced view the specific situation asks for responsible soldiers, explicitly or at least implicitly written in international laws and agreements. This is or will be formulated without or with contribution derived from our belief, the Mount Sermon, the Roman Catholic conviction in a Christian environment. Two thousand years of experience and fundamental studies should have an impact.

1. In fall **1999** we had our Conference in **Reichenau** in Austria. Italy with Brigadier General Giancarlo Naldi and his team handed over the AMI Presidency to the AKS, the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholischer Soldaten" of Austria. Keynote speaker of this meeting was Cardinal Dr. Franz Koenig. In his remarkable words he explained the change in the roles and responsibilities of laywomen and –men in relation to the clergy. The laic share for the future of our religion has increased significantly, and this is specifically due for soldiers. This was taken seriously and members of four countries started to draft a paper, "**The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the Third Millennium**". As usual, it was too heavy and had to be reduced to ten pages. The questions we tried to answer were: **Why do we serve?** What must be communicated is the original vocation of humanity to a status in which the dignity and rights of an individual are of prime value, regardless of rank, sex, race, and religion. As we believe that human beings are an image of Him, this is self-explaining.
What do we stand for? For the national and international legal order, naturally. But essential are the ethical demands on the soldier. Key is the conscience as final authority of personal decisions, based on a valid system of values – again the Mount Sermon - and sufficient expert knowledge.
What do we expect respectively demand of a Catholic soldier but also of politicians, and the responsible in society, military and church as well, was the last rather frankly answered question.
In November 2000 the draft was scrutinized, corrected, rewritten and unanimously accepted by the Conference in Rome. **The Declaration of the AMI General Assem-**

bly on 15. November 2000 in Rome was born. The participants had the feeling to be supported from Above in this rather not easy task, a product which should not end up in an archive, but live as a project.

Martin Luther's monastery of the Augustines in **Erfurt**, Germany, was the place of the **Conference 2001** with the intention to emphasize two things: that we want to cooperate with the protestants, who participated again, this time in significant number and that we want to have new members, also and especially from former suppressed countries, in our organisation. The responsibility for the **project**, defined in the declaration of 2000, was given to Prof van Iersel from the Netherlands. The aim is to influence training and education in our countries. It is self-explaining, that the cooperation can not be institutionalised, but should be based on a personal working relationship on national and international level. Our protestant friends have produced a very similar paper. The frame in a medieval town and monastery, the impressive pilgrimage to the cathedral of Erfurt and the informed State President of Thurenia, Bernhard Vogel, were supportive elements.

The development in Columbia did not permit to have the Conference 2002 in this country - but we are sure there will be another opportunity.

After about eight years of sometimes successful, sometimes abortive terrorist actions the attack in New York and Washington in September 2001 made evident, that we have to live with another form of threat for the foreseeable future. Therefore the topic for the AMI- Conference 2002 was well chosen.

2. Then something unexpected occurred. In a secret vote AMI was elected to and charged with the **Presidency of the CICO, the Conference of International Catholic Organisations in December 2001 in Bangkok**. The aim of CICO is mainly to give catholic interests a voice, that they may be heard, understood and accepted in the international development. About forty international organisations like Caritas Internationalis, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, three international competence centres - collocated with UN-Organisations - and AMI of course, belong to the CICO with its around **200 million members**. A General Assembly agrees on common projects. Examples are "the Waiving of Debts" combined with concrete measures concerning "Sustainable Development" with the objective to fight poverty, "Education", "Communication", "Violence against Women", "Underprivileged Groups of Societies" etc.

This is a **chance for the military**, for us. Our Armed Forces invest a lot in improved **relationships between the military** and the respective **society**. Now we have the chance for free on **an international level**. But we have to show competence, to increase efficiency. A successful presidency would be a success of and for all of us.

Yours
In our Lord sincerely
Ernest König
President AMI