

Report of the President

Excellences, Generals, Admirals, Ladies & Gentlemen, dear Friends, once more again, welcome to Nairobi to this years AMI conference. I specially would like to welcome the delegations from xxx and the delegates who didn't have the opportunity to take part at our yesterday's welcome evening.

Before I will talk about the goals and ideas we have identified for the near and mid-term future and the topics for this conference I would like to thank you all for your vote of confidence you gave to me and the new presidency during the last years election.

Meanwhile we had two meetings of the presidency and we made our first visit to the Holy See where we spoke with Msgr Caccia and Msgr Kühn from the state secretariat, bishop Clemens the secretary of the Pontifical council for the Laity and a Pater who is responsible for the international military chaplaincy. All these talks were very interesting, of cause for me because it was my first time - but mainly because all our interlocutors assured us that they want to sustain our goals and our work and they all hope that we will stay in close contact.

This leads me to one of our guests and speakers during the last years conference - bishop Clemens. With his briefing he stressed that the holy See is placing some expectations on the work of the Apostolate Militaire International.

He summed up these expectations to 7 wishes. Allow me to remember these.

1. Fidelity to the Conciliar idea of the soldier as "servants of the security and freedom of the nations...for the strengthening of peace."
2. Intensifying of the fundamental goals in the Statutes of the AMI, the training and further education with special observance of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents.
3. More profound study of the anthropological foundations of Church teaching on peace, justice and fraternity between peoples.
4. Development of guidelines for application to concrete situations, such as justified self-defence and the use of force, according to the principles of Catholic social doctrine.
5. Cooperation with other International Catholic Organizations for testifying to Christian values and Church teaching in International Organizations (UNO, Europarat, UNESCO, BIT, etc.).
6. Regular contact and cooperation with the responsible organs of the Holy See (Secretariat of State, PCPL, PCGP) in the topics named. Participation in the events of the Pontifical Council for the Laity for mutual exchange and for further study.
7. Competent participation in the works of international government organisms, in which concrete programs (disarmament, no-trade agreements of atomic weapons and resolution of conflicts) are developed.

I want to divide these in three parts. The first one where everyone is asked to contribute, for example the Nr 1:

“Fidelity to the conciliar idea of a soldier as ‘servants of the security and freedom of the nations’ for the strengthening of peace.”

The second one where we need professionals and professional work to be done from which we all can contribute. For example the Nr 2 or 3. We can use our annual conference to make us familiar with profound studies of the anthropological foundations of church teaching on peace, justice and fraternity between people. To reach such a goal we have to use our theological adviser, we have to invite theologians to our conferences or we have to build a working group out of our community and task the group to prepare such a topic for the following annual conference.

And the third one I take as a task for the presidency to show flag at the Holy See and in International Organisations. We should work shoulder to shoulder with the Holy See. One of the focal points the Responsibles of the State Secretariat made during our visit to Rome was testifying to christian values and church teaching in International Organisations like the UNO or European council, etc.

We should discuss during our conference if we want AMI to get the admission as a NGO. In this regard I would like to mention a request from the Holy See to change or to correct our constitution and our standing orders in some minor parts. More about this from our Secretary general.

However, this is only one part I want to talk about and discuss with you during our conference. The other part concerns our own goal, not triggered from outside but from own decisions as an independent organisation.

I talked about goals for the near and mid-term future. For the near future I would like to change the character of our annual conference. This conference should be a week/or days full of discussions between the delegations and the delegates.

The role of the presidency should be to moderate through the programme. We need the time to learn, to learn from each other - from foreign experiences and as I mentioned before, from professionals or our members who work in international working groups tasked by the annual conference to prepare a topic for the next meeting. The time we have together is short enough and therefore we should use it very intensive. My aim is that after a conference everyone who took part is returning home with the assurance that it was very important to be here and that those who stayed home can see that it was also very helpful for the national organisation to send delegates to the conference.

Moreover, we as delegations should be able to take something home - something we can transform in our national system to improve the national situation.

But to make such an idea real, to fulfil it with life, I think we need more contact's during the year. Only once in a conference isn't enough. We don't need to be in contact all together but we have to build a network which is working the whole time.

My imagination is that we build one or more, that depends on budget, topics etc, working groups where each country has the possibility to name a member. The groups, how many are useful we have to discuss, should consist of not more than 4 members to make them work effective.

In my opinion they can mainly use the internet to produce their contribution for the next conference but they may also meet at least for the last tuning.

Therefore, I know, we need money and not all nations are able to pay for tickets and accommodation for such meetings but we, the presidency, made the experience during the last year, that we can do our work more cost effective than in previous years, because we don't have to pay for an official office and so on. That means that if everyone is able to pay the yearly fee I think we can enable as AMI to sponser such a network and small meetings during the year. We can sustain the nations who are not able to pay for their working group member so that they can meet. The paperwork is one thing but we also need more opportunities for our delegates to make friends with each other and to build up a living network.

It's an idea we should discuss in the evenings but I'm sure that this is a way to make AMI more effective for each of us.

We could combine this with invitations to national or international events like the last world youth day in Germany or others and we can use pilgrimages like Lourdes to keep these personal contacts during the year. My experience in private life tells me that with people/friends with whom you don't meet you loose your close contact and maybe your common understanding. And with these ideas I'm in the middle of our this year conference. I mentioned yesterday in my welcome address that you may have been surprised about the length of the conference. In particular with regard to our discussions in Bratislava to shorten the conference to three or four days. Nevertheless, if you recall my remarks with regard to a new set up of our meetings, the presidency decided that we need time to talk on the one hand but also need time to make friends on the other. Additionally I would like to mention that keeping in mind it took us a lot of hours to come here and this marvellous country has so much to offer from her beauty and culture that we should be able to combine our intensions. I hope we made this decision in your accordance.

The topic: "Strengthening of christian values within Armed forces worldwide"

is the over all topic which should us accompanie the next three years. From year to year we have to look for subtopics under the intension to strengthen christian values.

This year we will discuss three of them in different working groups starting with impulse briefings held by Kenya, Netherlands and Germany. Kenya will speak about soldiers and their

families, the Netherlands about the problems within a secularised society and Germany about the challenges of christian leadership.

We will deepen the subjects in the mentioned working groups afterwards and try to produce a summary about the results.

Next to this I'm sure that we will spent a very fruitful time together, that we will be able to decide about the changes we have to make in our constitution, that we can start with the new system of a working group or working groups and that we will take home the African spirit of faith.

Thank you very much for your attention and let's start now.