

Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends!

Good morning and welcome again to this AMI General Assembly 2007 in Mariastein, in the country of chocolate, knives, watches, money and big mountains, Switzerland.

Let me first thank our hosts on behalf of all the members of AMI for inviting us and for preparing this conference in such an outstanding manner.

Thank you very much.

I'm delighted to welcome delegates and representatives of so many members and of friendly/associated countries and I'm even more delighted that we have been successful in our attempt to bring back "old member countries" to our AMI-family. The participation of the Colonel Aparicio del Barrio from Spain might be a proof for that. But also the reactions of the Philippines, Ukraine and Italy.

So I appreciate being able to welcome the delegations from:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Germany
- Great Britain
- Kenya
- Letuvenia
- Netherlands
- Nigeria
- Slovenia
- Slovakia
- Switzerland
- And our friends from AMCF Mj Fillingham and his wife

Other countries like Hungary, the Ukraine & Bosnia can't take part because of lack of money, so if possible we have to discuss during the conference how we can enable these countries a start or a restart in our AMI-family.

The third group of countries I have to mention are old AMI-member countries which haven't reacted to our invitation, like France, Columbia, Kongo-Brazavile or Canada so we have to go on with our endeavour to bring them back. Everyone of us has to use his own contacts to fulfil this task, because the strength of AMI depends on the strength of its members.

Before I now want to speak about the goals of our this year conference and the near future of AMI I have to inform you about the death of one of our foundation delegates.

It is with deep mourning and sympathy for his family that I have to inform you about the death of our well known comrade and friend from Belgium, Colonel Cyril Desmet who died on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at the age of 75 years. He represented the Belgians and AMI during a lot of AMI conferences and he was always committed to our aims and mission. We will have a commemoration service for him and all our deceased friends during Holy Mass.

In this context I would ask all our members to inform the Secretary General in case that any of our friends has died. We don't want it to happen that friends who have worked together with us for our Military Apostolate be forgotten by our community.

Back to the aims of our this year conference. This conference might be very important and may be decisive for the future of AMI.

We have to deal with very important general topics like our overall topic: "Strengthening Christian Values within Armed forces world wide" and we have to discuss topics which deal with our own future and our future way like the problems how to become a NGO, to ask for accreditation within the UN, the future cooperation with CICO and the Holy See and our financial situation. Last but not least we have to start with talks about the next presidency of AMI because Austria decided, that they will not continue the General Secretariat for one more term.

So if you look at our timetable we have tried to make more time available for discussion than in the assemblies the years before.

Concerning the NGO-topic I read in old papers of AMI that this isn't a brand new topic. Ten years ago one of the former presidents of AMI BG Giancarlo Naldi mentioned:

“Today, in fact, all the problems are lived in a world-wide perspective and the globalization of problems must be matched also by a globalization of structures, which try to solve them.

For this reason I strongly believe in the need of placing in the first place among our objectives, an increase in the member of AMI-member countries and the formal and legal incorporation of our organization, which has now only a recognition from the Holy See however, it has no legal recognition which would allow AMI to contact the Authorities and the leading international Organizations (such as, for example, UNESCO) in order to be involved in their projects and thus bring a Christian approach to the various issues being reviewed.

Ten years ago he had the vision but today we are able to full fill it. But I don't have to mention the past only. I have informed you in our invitation about our visit to the Holy See and our meeting within the State Secretariat. We had two appointments. The first in the State Secretariat with Mons. Caccia, Mons. Parotin and Dotoressa Alvarez.

The second appointment was with the Pontificio Consiglio de Justitia et pax with bishop Crepaldi and his men.

As a result of the visit in the State Secretariat I can fix the following:

- the responsible persons in the State Secretariat were well informed about our conference in Nairobi and they also mentioned that from their point of view it was very successful;
- they informed us about the new ideas of the Holy See concerning International Catholic Organisation (ICO) and their intention to unify them in a new “Forum” and the centres which are located near to the UN in New York, Geneva, Vienna, in fact that means that CICO, as we know it, will possibly die from the point of view of the Holy See.
- during this reorganisation of the lay organisations they prefer it that all organisations which are able to sustain this new organisation by experts who would apply for a NGO-Status and ask for accreditation in one of the UN-centres;

- the money the Holy See gives to different lay organisations today from the Pius XII. foundation should be used for the centres and for the forum in future. This means for us, that we will have to look for other possibilities to get money for AMI;
- they also declared that if it is not possible for us as AMI to get the NGO-Status they want to connect us to the centres elsewhere and they will invite us to the Forum because they are interested in our special expertise.

To sum it up, for AMI and our assembly here in Switzerland that means we have to decide several things. First our further commitment to CICO. Shall we stay in this organisation as a member, as which we have to pay for it or should we concentrate our forces on the new forum or both.

CICO itself met in Paris to discuss its own future. One result was that CICO doesn't want to dissolve itself. They discussed a new and more effective structure with less meetings, reduced fees and also new preconditions to take part.

I think we have to wait what CICO will decide for its own future to be able to decide what we shall do concerning our membership.

Beside this decision we have to decide this week, if we should accept the offer of the Holy See to become a member of the new Forum, as NGO or only as expert.

Further about the topic I mentioned before, that is if we want to become a NGO. But more about that from our experts LtCol Jedlicka and .....during the conference.

As to our second appointment I can report to you, that it was for the first time, that AMI-officials met with Justitia et Pax.

Bishop Crepaldi and his men were very delighted about our visit and asked for participation in our conference and they invited AMI to take part in their conference which deals with the topic: Human dignity and Humanitarian law – The role of religions.

Unfortunately Dr. Tommaso di Rusza who was earmarked to take part in our conference is occupied otherwise this week.

In general they are interested in two topics we also deal with:

- ecumenism within armed forces
- humanitarian law and Christian values

So we will hold close contact and may be we can welcome a member of Justitia et Pax next year.

The last point I want to mention now is our financial situation. As you could read in the invitation some members of AMI didn't pay their membership fee more than once. To fulfil our tasks we need the money and so we discussed some possibilities to solve this problem. We don't want to increase the yearly amount but we look for more equality. So one solution could be, that we ask for a small fee from all nations who take part in the conference. For example it could start with 200.-€ in the second year of participation and we could increase the fee year by year until it would reach the 800.-€ every member has to pay. We will have to discuss this problem also during the conference and I hope we will find a common solution.

So as you have heard a lot of work has to be done this week here in Mariastein, in this wonderful house and beautiful region. And once more thank you very much Mr. Aebi, Mr. Bachmann and Peter for organising this conference for us here.

Thank you for your attention.