



Report of the President of AMI



Brigadier General Reinhard Kloss

Welcome again to this year's AMI-Conference in Austria and this beautiful region of Carinthia. I hope you enjoyed the last evening in Klagenfurt, the wonderful opening mass and our welcome dinner, and that all of you are now fit and well prepared for our conference and the working sessions over the next days.

Before I say a few words on our main topic, intercultural competence, let me first thank our hosts on behalf of all members of AMI for inviting and hosting us and for preparing this conference in such an outstanding manner.

Michael and your team thank you very much.

- **This year's conference**

This year's conference seems to be a special one. I think it is quite important to mention the fact that we have at least in part a new presidency, which I would like to introduce to you. Our new secretary general is Mrs. Nelleke Swinkels from the Netherlands. Also from The Netherlands are her coworkers chief chaplain colonel

Jan van Lieverloo and the man who manages our budget, Herman Vriesema. From Germany are the vicepresidents, LtCol Christoph Auer and Mastersergeant Andreas Koppers and myself.

- **Back to our delegations and this conference**

I have to admit that I feared the bad economical situation in most countries would influence our AMI-conference directly. Looking at our own situation in Germany, the Armed Forces are a preferred target for the government in its attempt to save money. And if the budget of the Armed Forces is to be reduced, the budget of the military chaplancy for sure will not increase. And so, the laymen being the last element in the chain may be the first with real money problems. Taking this into account I appreciate it very much that so many delegations take part in this year's conference. I don't give away a secret when I tell you, that by the end of August Michael was very disappointed because only a small number of delegations had handed in their registrations. Anyway, by the end of August and during the first days of September we placed a lot of phone calls and today I'm very happy to be able to welcome again such a big number of delegations.

- **New delegates within AMI**

I am also very pleased to welcome for the first time a delegation from Ireland, Monsignor Thynne Eoin within the AMI-family. And I extend a warm welcome to the new delegates from the United States, Colonel Brian van Sickle and his wife and from Nigeria, Chief Chaplain Brigadier Aina and LtCol Father Iroegbu.

A warm welcome also to his Excellency Bishop Rabek the Military Bishop of Slovakia and also a warm welcome to my General vicar, protonotar Monsignor Wakenhut, Chief of the German Military Chaplaincy. Allow me to add that I'm personally very happy, that you are with us at this conference.

And of course a particular welcome to all the other delegates from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain (Cdr Brian Parker from the AMCF and his wife Jean) Kenya, Lithuania, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Slovenia, to Austria and to the AMI-Conference.

Unfortunately some of the delegations which took part last year are not able to take part this year for different reasons.

Switzerland is dealing with the challenge that they have to organize the Lourdes-Conference this week. From Malawi, unfortunately I didn't hear anything and the delegates from Spain, whom we were very happy to have back in our AMI-Family last year, did not receive permission by their bishop to take part because of the NGO discussion we had last year and which we will have to finish this year.

- **NGO Discussion**

We have to finish it because we have been discussing this topic since our conference in Switzerland. It seems that the idea to gain such a status causes more problems than advantages for our organisation, looking for example at the situation in Spain. But more on this on Wednesday when I will explain the possibilities we have and will ask you for a final decision.

- **Our main topic this year**

Our main topic this year however deals with "Intercultural Competence" or "cultural awareness". Allow me to give you a short introduction from a German point of view, what does "Intercultural Competence" or "cultural awareness" mean and why it is so very important for us as soldiers.

Intercultural competence is the basis for both conflict-free interaction with people from a cultural environment other than one's own and for responsible behaviour in foreign cultures. It helps us in the process to understand foreign cultures and to adapt our own patterns of behaviour. Intercultural competence means being aware of the effect of one's own culture upon one's thinking and actions, it means understanding foreign cultures, practising behavioural patterns for the interaction with other people and learning strategies / behavioural patterns for coping with emotional stress. Within this context culture should be understood as the open and dynamic process of analysing and negotiating meanings. In terms of the individual, culture can also be described as a model for interpretation – unconscious at times – which can influence the action and behaviour of members of a group. Most of the times a society is made up of several cultures in which different individuals move about at the same time. Depending on the perspective chosen, culture can be understood either as a "process", but also as a "something static".

As a result of increasing globalisation and the opening of societies to people from other cultures and religions, developing and strengthening intercultural competence is becoming an increasing challenge for societies as a whole. Why is this important

for Armed Forces? For the Bundeswehr, and may be for your Armed Forces, too, this important for the following reasons:

- **Firstly**

Increasing cultural and religious diversity within the Bundeswehr. Due to the different cultural backgrounds of servicemen and -women, intercultural communication within the German Armed Forces represents a permanent challenge and leadership responsibility during day-to-day routine duty. Stimulating the willingness to communicate, getting to know each other, understanding and trusting each other – this is the basic prerequisite for teaching and standing up for norms and values.

- **Secondly**

Increasing internationalisation due to the assignment of Bundeswehr personnel to multinational headquarters and units. A successful international cooperation with other Armed Forces requires awareness, understanding of and tolerance for the cultural, ethnical and religious particularities of other army's.

- **Thirdly**

Intercultural encounters within the framework of operations abroad.

On operations in crisis areas, intercultural competence very much helps service personnel to act with confidence and show sensible behaviour towards people from other cultures in theatre. Furthermore, it helps to prevent wrong or premature assessments of situations and own potential misconduct, and it builds confidence. The ability to deal with people from different cultural backgrounds increases the military personnel's confidence in their actions and behaviour and guarantees the acceptance of minorities in the Bundeswehr. During operations abroad, intercultural competence is a vital prerequisite for mission accomplishment and self-protection. Intercultural competence is a key skill and a character trait which is required by service members, especially by those in responsible leadership positions. In the Bundeswehr, intercultural competence is considered to be the ability and willingness to deal with different cultures, living environment and their

particularities in an appropriate way as well as the ability to accomplish one's mission in a foreign environment.

- **Empathy, role distance, intercultural communication and tolerance**

Looked upon regardless of any cultural specifics, intercultural competence implies, above all, the following abilities: empathy, role distance, intercultural communication and tolerance. This also includes an unbiased attitude, openness and the willingness to communicate, complemented by adequate regional knowledge, knowledge about the specific features of a culture as well as an adequate language proficiency. Apart from achieving military professionalism including all the necessary technical skills, it is essential and equally important to convey ethical competence, appropriate moral judgment and intercultural competence to our military personnel and to strengthen these skills.

I shall leave at this and I am looking forward to some fruitful discussion on this subject during our conference and I particularly pleased to be able to welcome three real experts who will have a special look at the different angles (military, theological and physiological) of this topic.

- **Two working Groups**

In addition to the discussion on intercultural competence s our ecclesiastical adviser, Monsignor Dr. Freistetter, will lead two working groups during the conference which have to work on a new, better follow-on-paper to our declaration from ROM, "The Christian soldier in the 3rd millennium".

We will establish a German and an English speaking working group but both of them will have to present their results in English. So I'm sure that we will spent a very fruitful time together and I will pray for good results in the working groups but also in the discussions in the audience.