

Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen – dear friends!

After the welcome addresses by our Military General Vicar, Prelate Walter Wakenhut and by our Deputy chief of Staff of the German Armed Forces, General Günter Weiler it is now up to me as acting AMI-President, to welcome you to our AMI-General Assembly 2010 in Berlin, in my country, maybe known to you as the country of Sauerkraut and Schweinshaxe.

But I can promise you, we will offer you more than that over the next days. First of all I would like to introduce to all our new delegates the Presidency of AMI. There is first of all our Lady, the Secretary General Nelleke Swinkels. She is supported by the Chief Chaplain of the Netherlands Jan van Lieverloo and by Herman Vriesema and his wife Ans who acts as treasurer.

As vice presidents are acting LtCol Christoph Auer and Master Sergeant Andreas Koppers from Germany. After these introductions back to the conference, back to you.

I'm delighted to be able to welcome so many delegates and representatives, an attendance so large in numbers, which as far as I can remember, we never achieved before in such a conference.

So I appreciate it very much that delegations from 14 countries and two organisations take part in this conference. A warm welcome to:

- Austria
- Lithuania
- Slovakia
- Belgien
- Netherlands
- Spain

- Germany            - Nigeria            - United States of America
- Great Britain   - Philippines
- Ireland            - Slovenia

But also – attending for the first time - a warm welcome to Mrs Durand-Ballivet the General Secretary from Crescendo and of course a warm welcome to our well known Cdr Brian Parker and his wife from the A.M.C.F.

Before I now speak about the goals/the objectives of this year's conference I would like to ask you to inform our secretary General Nelleke in case any of our friends have died since the last conference we had in Austria so we can remember him or her during Holy Mass. We don't want it to happen that our community forgets friends who have worked together with us for our Apostolate Military International.

Let me now talk about the aims of this year's conference. I think they are very ambitious for the next three days.

On Thursday you will get the chance during our cultural day to become more familiar with our capital Berlin. But the next three – hopefully very interesting days - are also full of work and I for myself hope, with successful work, so we will be able to present 10 years after our declaration of Rome in the year 2000 a new paper, the declaration of Berlin. And I sincerely hope we will be able to do so, because any position, formulated in an environment of change becomes less relevant over the course of time.

Therefore it was necessary to draft this new Declaration, taking in account what significant changes have taken place during the past ten years.

As you know a working group was formed which prepared a first draft.

This was finalized end of July and you were informed by mail and on our website about this product. You had the opportunity to read it, to add own thoughts and/or to correct things if you thought it could be done better.

For that reason I would like to thank first of all Werner and his working group, Brian, Frank, Tibor and Christoph for preparing this first draft but also all the others who worked on it and sent us their suggestions to improve it. The paper you find in the documents you received yesterday and which will be the basis for the work in the working group is therefore the third or fourth draft and includes all the ideas and suggestions that we have received until today. So a lot of work already has been done, but we have to finish it.

To do this successfully we have to widen our point of view. Although the headline of our declaration is directed to the Christian Soldier we also have to deal with the preconditions and surroundings a soldier and his family live in.

So the conference topic “Government, Society, Church and Christian Soldiers – reciprocal expectations and demands” illustrates this and has given us the chance to invite and to hear experts who will speak to us about the different points of view.

We as soldiers have especial expectations of our governments, of the society and church. We want appreciation because our profession often is very dangerous. We want solidarity but no compassion. The former President of Germany, Horst Köhler, spoke about a friendly lack of interest that consists in Germany towards the Armed Forces. We want more. We have our own demands, demands which don't necessarily have to be identical with the point of view of the governments, the society or the church or maybe even the military chaplaincy has.

If we speak in our declaration of Rome about the self-perception, self-presentation and acceptance of Christian soldiers, we want to broaden this view this year and we want to speak about the responsibility the others, Governments, society and church have for us.

So I'm very happy that our State Secretary in the MOD, Christian Schmidt, the bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam and Military bishop of the Netherlands, his Excellency, Bishop Punt, General Karl-Heinz Lather, Chief of Staff in SHAPE and last but not least Prof. Dr. Justenhoven will speak to us. They all have promised that there will be time enough for discussions so you could - with a view to our new declaration - ask everything which you think needs to be clarified.

But there is one more thing that we shouldn't forget, and that is a very important part of the conference:

Besides all the necessary work on the declaration an AMI-Conference always has been and should be an opportunity for an exchange of views and opinions and to refresh friendships.

Taking all this into account I'm very optimistic that we will have an interesting conference and also a successful one. I am convinced that by the end of the week we should be able to finish our paper, in order to be able to present it at the end of the conference as a common paper of the Apostolat Militaire International.

Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends once more again thank you all very much for coming and let's start the conference with the best intension to have interesting and fruitful discussions, to finish our common declaration and find new friends.

Thank you for your attention.