



Grußwort (Word of Welcome)

Generalleutnant Günter Friedrich Weiler

Stellvertreter des Generalinspektors der Bundeswehr
zur Versammlung der weltweiten Dachorganisation
des organisierten Laienapostolats
„Apostolat Militaire International“ (AMI)

vom 26. September bis 1. Oktober 2010

in Berlin

Anrede, (Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Comrades,)

- The last AMI conference in Germany took place in Erfurt in 2001, so it is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you to Germany again. This time Berlin is the host city for the AMI General Assembly.
- Today, Christian soldiers of many nations have gathered here under the theme “The Christian soldier: servant of the security and freedom of the peoples” to discuss “government, society, Church, and Christian soldiers and their reciprocal expectations and demands”. This is a topical and important issue.
- It is the task of responsible politicians not only to decide whether or not military force should be employed but also to consider ethical reasons. Moreover, it is mandatory for them to explain to citizens – including soldiers – the mission and its rationale. Reason and responsibility are human characteristics. Acting in a responsible and ethical manner is an important part of being a soldier.

- The community of Catholic soldiers in the Bundeswehr has used the teachings of the Church on peace to develop criteria¹ that stipulate that military force may only be applied
 - if a legitimate authority orders a combat operation and, having right intention, attempts to avoid or end massive violations of international law in order to facilitate and safeguard the peaceful development of the community of states,
 - if there is a just cause, in other words if the international legal order is upset, international security is endangered, or massive violations of human rights are committed,
 - if it appears suitable as a last resort to avoid or end a conflict, since peaceful viable alternatives have been exhausted or are not practical,
 - if there is a high probability of warding off a threat or ending a conflict and creating a situation in which peace is less threatened than before and
 - if it, as a lesser evil, does not lead to harm and turmoil that are worse than the evil being fought.

- These criteria have an obligatory character. Therefore, and because soldiers can only be deployed on the basis of international law and in accordance with their constitution, you can demand and expect that your government and parliament can give convincing answers about political necessity, ethical justification, and military sense of operations.

¹ see Beestermöller, Gerhard: *Krieg gegen den Irak – Rückkehr in die Anarchie der Staatenwelt?*, Stuttgart 2002, in particular chapter IV.

- Due to multinational and international commitments, membership in NATO, EU, or in the United Nations, many countries are willing to take over responsibility for peace and security in the world. The decision each country makes about its contribution cannot, however, be automatic. Decision making must be based on sound facts and answer the questions if the use of military force is urgent and if other means are available and suitable to solve a crisis. In addition one also must consider whether an operation is politically sustainable. Governments and parliaments should
 - always consider military operations as part of a sound overall concept,
 - plan and conduct operations in coordination with all parties involved,
 - analyse the conflict, the risks and the opportunities in order to thoroughly prepare their decision,
 - be able to explain the necessity of the operation to the public and the soldiers and
 - gain and maintain public support, and always keep in mind that “taking part” is a full commitment.
- Let us consider the example of ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. At present, ISAF consists of more than 110,000 soldiers from over 40 nations. The main task of the allied forces is to establish peace and help to shape a secure environment. ISAF is prepared to fight if necessary.

- Soldiers are aware of the dangers in this theatre of operations. They nevertheless perform their task with courage, moral obligation, responsibility, and bravery. Our commitments to the Afghan people remain firm. We want to help this abused country to bring peace to its people and by doing so to contribute to our own security.
- Direct confrontation with the suffering of people in a mission raises fundamental questions. In order to fulfil their mission and to help the people our soldiers put themselves in harms way. They are exposed to the results of violence, often enough experiencing the death of comrades and friends. This is a special challenge for the individual soldier and for us, being responsible for the training.
- In the Bundeswehr more and more soldiers are realising that in such situations Christian belief can offer the greatest help. Although only 54% of German soldiers are of the Christian faith, over 90% request pastoral support during operations.

A total of 97% believe that military chaplains provide particularly valuable support in the event of an accident or if a comrade is killed in action. This is expressed in statements such as: "When I'm deployed, I want to have a chaplain at my side."

- Missions abroad require soldiers to have not only a sound ethical conscience but also an enhanced ability to make moral judgements. Therefore, our soldiers need opportunities to develop a sound ethical understanding about their military profession which will help them to prevail in combat situations. They require ethical competence in order to cope with challenges in extreme situations and under stress.
- We Christian soldiers can find those ethical foundations in our religion. Christian values give us invaluable support. A Christian must not be a soldier, but it helps a soldier to be a Christian!
- Intercultural competence inevitably requires cultural competence.
- Again and again soldiers with firm religious beliefs have made their voices heard in public debates about peace and security. I hope this will continue. We Christian soldiers are servants to the security and freedom of the people. In performing this task properly, we truly contribute to consolidating peace, as it is said in a document of the Second Vatican Council.
- With this in mind, I wish you all the best for your conference and hope that you will find satisfying answers to the topical theme's pressing questions.