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Dear Members of 2013 AMI Conference,

Warm welcome! It is a great pleasure for me as Slovenian Bishop who is responsible for spiritual care of uniformed persons, to welcome all the delegates to this Annual General Assembly of the Apostolat Militaire International ("AMI").

It is an honor for me and Slovenian chaplaincy and whole Slovenian armed forces that this conference is taking place in Slovenija. Dom sveti Jožef, Educational and pastoral center of Celje diocese is appropriate place for your conference.

The main topic of the AMI Conference 2013 is today's understanding of Second Vatican Council through the interpretation of the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et spes" and encyclical "Pacem in Terris".

"Gaudium et Spes", the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, was one of the four Apostolic Constitutions resulting from the Second Vatican Council. The document is an overview of the Catholic Church's teachings about humanity's relationship to society, especially in reference to economics, poverty, social justice, culture, science, technology and ecumenism.

"Pacem in terris" with full title "On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty" was the first encyclical that the Pope addressed to "all men of good will", rather than only to Catholics.

In this work, John XXIII reacted to the political situation in the middle of the Cold War. The "peace encyclical" was issued only two years after the erection of the Berlin Wall and only a few months after the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Pope explains in this encyclical that conflicts "should not be resolved by recourse to arms, but rather by negotiation". He further emphasizes the importance of respect of human rights as an essential consequence of the Christian understanding of men. He clearly establishes "...That every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life..."

Second Vatican Council is still a challenge for everybody, especially for soldiers who are more and more deployed in humanitarian and peace keeping operations with the NATO and the EU, attempt to establish peace in areas which are torn by war and violence. However, for the military, those engagements demand a permanent reflection around "war and peace", "remembrance and awakening", "dead and sacrifice" and "duty".

Each Christian soldier is able to learn out of his personal experience with Christ and his faith. Faith and Church's teaching shall in this case be a powerful support in his confrontation with the reality of violence and war.

Commemoration in a Christian inspiration shall be the groundwork of a righteousness and ethical engagement. Remembrance and commemoration could be in this Christian acceptance a real "peace maker".

The Declaration of AMI General Assembly of Berlin in October 2010 with his topic "The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace" could remain the guideline for further reflections around the deployment of Christian soldiers in every day operations.

May this international conference be the paragon of vision and cooperation, of reflection and meaning to life, finding its inspiration in the Biblical tradition, Church's teaching and the faith in Jesus Christ, who gave his life for all of us, so that the love of God may flourish in our hearts and in our world that we live in just peace.

With my best wishes and God bless all of you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name 'Stres'.

+ Anton Stres, PhD,
President of the *Slovenian Bishops' Conference*
Responsible Bishop for the pastoral care of
uniformed persons