



**APOSTOLAT MILITAIRE INTERNATIONAL**  
**the PRESIDENT**

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIAN VALUES WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES WORLDWIDE

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### **Report of the president**

Good morning Excellencies, Generals and Admirals, soldiers of all ranks, ladies and gentlemen, dear brothers and sisters in faith!

A very old song of the Mamas and the Papas starts with the following lyrics:

“Monday, Monday, so good to me...” – unfortunately after the first line it becomes a sad love song, what I do not expect it will become to me too in a transitive sense. Therefore I stop it here.

So thus let me start my report about the activities of AMI president of the last year. Not to be necessary to be explained that my SecGen and I we shared all information, work, pleasure and success, defeats too. Although we try to tell you different stories about same matters, something will sound similar.

Last year we organised our conference in Spain, Santiago de Compostela.

We met so many Spanish friends, to be named first H.E. Military Archbishop Juan del Río Martín, his Vicar General Don Panadero and Don Rascón, Don Lorenzo, Fernando Bonelli and Eusebio Horno and others. It was an incredible deep experience, I suppose for all of us.

Having luck to be allowed to organize our conference in Spain, Santiago de Compostela, the place where AMI was founded 50 years ago, was marvellous and worth all work we did to make it possible.

I still feel it a privilege having worked on the outcome of the conference, feeling the spirituality spreading out from Santiago de Compostela, the cathedral, but even the Seminario Mayor, And I suppose all delegates present last year feel the same.

I would like to ask our delegates from Spain to pass all my gratitude and thanks again to Military Archbishop Juan del Río Martín.

We did a lot of preparatory work for it, especially by producing and publishing a book about 50 years of AMI and its future. Although complicated, we all involved in the production process did a great job.

Our jubilee-book at the same time was the green light for starting thinking about our future as AMI.

Experienced by life it was clear for me that from the very moment we decided to deal or think about, it would become a difficult discussion, as it always is when someone is starting looking at himself.

The main focus lay on the questions

- What are the goals of AMI, which are looking clear, because given by our statutes, But,
- How could we be more effective or/and efficient in our work?
- How could we intensify the work and the contributions given from our delegations?
- How could we interest more countries worldwide for our work?
- How could we be more present in the public?
- And how shall we proceed in the future?

And I invited all delegations and countries member to contribute to these questions.

Directly connected to this is the following question.

We worked hard to establish AMI even as an NGO. Last year we started the discussion, how AMI could contribute or come into force as such an organisation too. We did not yet find an answer, but we are working on it.

What should be our goals as an NGO?

Our visit in Rome November last year opened some new perspectives by giving good council to get contact with the Representative of the Holy See to the UN at Geneva. After the exchange of some letters it was possible to organize early January a common visit in Geneva at the Holy See's representative at the UN, Archbishop Tomasi, from who we got again some input concerning work in the frame of the UN. And he proposed to us to seek for contact with the Order of Malta. We even tried to get contact with Auxiliary Bishop Alain de Raemy of Switzerland, responsible for military matters within the Swiss Bishop's conference. Unfortunately he was not available at that time, but I tried it again later.

Geneva is even the seat of several NGO's that runs an own office there.

As one result of our talks in Geneva I even visited the Representative of the Holy See to the UN and OSCE in Vienna, Mons. Urbanczyk, because from the point of view of Geneva, the more interesting and practical work, is done here in Vienna, not in Geneva.

As a further result of our consultations I started to seek contact with the Order of Malta, which is not only a subject of international law but very efficient as an NGO too.

Unfortunately the first time I will have the opportunity to talk to the Prior of Austria is in October.

Following the idea of thinking about ourselves I invited all delegations coming to AMI to support us by making proposals themselves about the way we could proceed with our work. In fact I received answers and I am grateful to every delegation, which undertook the attempt to give some input. Some of it we will have the opportunity to listen to during our conference.

Strong stuff, I felt and feel at least up to now.

I wrote in my contribution to the AMI-book that I would try to do my best to make our work better and to find new countries to interest them into our work.

AMI- presidium led a lot of discussions, and we tried to make possible as much meetings as possible to discuss the topics.

I feel a strong wind against our organisation, mostly caused by financial restrictions in our member states, if, e.g., I look back to Santiago and the fact that at the end of our conference no member or associated country felt able to host this year's conference.

Therefore I am really grateful to the Military Bishop of the Netherlands Punt, the friends of ACOM and the Netherlands Armed Forces that they agreed at least to host our conference.

For Santiago it just was possible to take as much books with us as we needed for the presentation and to hand over as a gift to the delegations present and the responsables of Spain.

At home I started distributing our jubilee-book, what took a whole while, last ones I sent just a few weeks ago.

We sent it to many Eminences, Excellencies, military Ordinariates and Armed Forces worldwide. From many addressees I got responses. Some did not – as it is in life. Nevertheless I am convinced that the production of this book was an important contribution to make AMI more visible. The same is to be said about the next book, which we produced within another some months including all essential lectures we listened to at Santiago. Maybe I am old fashioned, but I sometimes think that it is better having a book in your hand reading than looking for a DVD, which has diminished or has already lost all data's.

And - we started thinking about a possible conference in Rome. When meeting in Rome the Military Bishop of Italy Santo Marciano at the end of April, I had the impression that he could imagine a conference in the year 2017 in Rome, one thing I will have to clarify and hopefully we can count on this development.

Later in October the Execom met again during the Enquête of the Austrian Institute for Religion and Peace, and I got again the opportunity to talk to the Bishops, General Vicars

and some other interested people about AMI, its goals and work. We again met old friends and found some new ones.

In January we met not only our German friends during the Holy Mass on behalf of the World Peace Day at Cologne, listened to the highly interesting speech of parliamentary state Secretary Ralf Brauksiepe, held again a meeting of the presidium and we met again Ruediger Attermayer from the German GKS to explore its situation and its possibilities to take the responsibility for the Secretariat General of AMI after 2017.

In March I met Military Bishop Jure Bogdan of Croatia and the Croatian delegate of 2015, Marinko Nikolic, his wife Kristina and their little daughter Martha in Zagreb to inform the new Military Bishop about AMI as an international lay military organisation and the importance of the Croatian Armed Forces and its Military Ordinariate for AMI.

Thanks to him, he sends again a delegate in the person of Colonel Dubravka Filipovic to participate at our conference, while Marinko left the military ordinariate to find new ways of work.

One of the highlights of this year was the invitation by Military Bishop Werner Freistetter to accompany him and assist the conference in Rome concerning 50 years "Spirituali militum curae" where I met again Fred van Iersel, but many other military Bishops, Vicar Generals and lay people. So it was possible to network and interest more people for our work.

I tried to maintain contacts to South Africa, South Korea and Canada by writing letters, but failed so far. Nevertheless and of course I will try it again, because I am of the opinion that even these countries are of great interest for our Catholic task.

Maybe I should even mention that I met at this occasion – by hazard – Bishop Josef Klemens, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and handed over to him our book about our work in Santiago as a gift.

In Lourdes we found opportunities to talk in friendship with Military Bishop Luc Ravèl and Lady Jane Gottardi from the USA, today present in our conference. - Thank you very much for joining us. We all hope that your expectations will be fulfilled.

After several attempts and letters to Argentina I am really lucky that Mons Candia decided to send a delegate of Argentina to our conference and happy we, Dr. Luciano Porri will hold “una conferencia”, as it is called in Spanish, for us.

At the end let me come to our conference here in Vught. We chose a very specialised theme “Laudato Sí and its influences on defence matters”. The frame in which all is happening is a bigger one.

Maybe we should listen to the following sentences, although highlighting the situation in the world, it can be seen as writing on the wall and, although directed even towards Europe, an explication of the situation of the whole world:

“Rarely the atmosphere of the world (especially in our “old Europe”) has been tainted by distrust, discord and fear. Anxiously one picks up the morning paper and –with a sigh of relief – one puts it down again, if nothing particularly menacing has come to pass.

Distrust against one’s neighbour has recently become pathological within many peoples; borders are closed apprehensively, day and night factories in Europe are at work to produce – after 20 centuries of magnificent accomplishments in all areas of human culture – the most splendid and ingenious instruments of destruction.

Distrust between peoples, fear among nations: what a disappointment, as we still and yet still dream of a brotherhood of peoples! What a grief for our souls, from where we hate – as the direst enemy of humankind – hate itself but stand defenceless and powerless in front of the bedlam of our brethren in all countries!” (Stefan Zweig: Die geistige Einheit Europas. 1936. Veroeffentlicht in Die Presse, 02.Juli 2016).

That is the situation we have to deal with. Modern words, actual, true, but dating back to the year 1936.

I will talk about this again tomorrow.

Last year Germany accepted around one million of refugees, Austria about one hundred thousand, coming in huge crowds to middle Europe, until it was decided to reduce the numbers of people possible to come in a significant way.

For this reason I held in May an interview with Austrian soldiers serving a mission on the border of Austria to Slovenia in context with the refugee stream coming to Austria to explore how the soldiers were feeling when guarding the border and supporting the

police forces to get the situation under control. Believe me the results were disillusioning.

What we intend to reflect on is not only the change of climate, but also its outcome. First it should be mentioned that our Holy Father did an excellent and comprehensive work on ecology and its outcome, accepted worldwide even by the most important ecologic scientists (who are not all believers). Maybe there is still hope looking at the newly signed climate treaty. It depends on all states of the world, of course first the bigger ones, but the single person, too. And this can be extremely terribly bad, if nobody is willing to change the attitude against our planet.

Some weeks ago I read a joke: One planet meets another. The first says 'how are you?' – And gets as an answer " Oh really bad. I'm suffering on the Homo sapiens!' –Never mind', the other answers,'that will pass away!

Our Holy Father is not only talking to the people on the northern and richer part of our world, but to all people wherever it is living. The change of climate is remarkable and is getting velocity. Alone this fact is causing conflicts with millions of refugees worldwide. And is not only the Syrian tragedy we are touched directly, but also the African tragedy or the tragedies of the Far East and Latin America. This movement triggered, as it is called in modern German "Völkerwanderung" , is not only caused by wars and internal conflicts, but even by the changes of climate, which make our planet non liveable in certain parts of our world.

Of course a challenge for all societies touched. And all societies are touched! All that can lead in a direction where soldiers have to fulfil orders and defend their societies against a stream of foreigner's and/immigrants or refugees coming from other parts of the world to settle here and being on the pursuit of luck. How to deal with it, when at the same momentum religious extremism leads to open hostility and war?

Terror and refugees, arising from the Middle East, are a main problem for Europe. – I spoke about already last year -, we are confronted with fear and misery of millions of people, and the fact, if looking on geography, there are not so much ways out of it. At the same time we are confronted with the cruel terror coming from the same region, but meanwhile even from our own countries. After these terrible acts of terrorism against innocent people in France and Belgium, AMI sent letters of condolence to the President of the French Republic, the King of Belgium and the Archbishop of Rouen.

To make our discussions easier, we will organize this year again three working groups, but all will discuss in English, to make possible bringing in more different and personal views. I hope that we will get better and comprehensive results, which can be used at the end of our assembly.

Coming to an end there are, beside our general theme "Laudato Si" two major projects we have to deal with and find solutions at the end of our conference:

- What shall be the role of AMI in the future and how shall it proceed, even as an NGO,  
and
- Who is willing to take the responsibility for AMI during the upcoming years.

Let us pray that we can be able to find the better solution.

That telling you I come to the end and say

Thank you for your attention!