



## **Closing Address AMI President Genmaj (ret) Norbert Sinn**

**Rome**

**September 21, 2017,**

**Excellencies, Admiral, generals, delegates and dear friends!**

This time my closing address will be different from all others, because I feel it is necessary to separate it into two parts:

**Part 1:** Talking about the 2017 conference that comes to an end now;

and

**Part 2:** Talking about 6 years of Austrian presidency.

**Part 1:**

**General assembly 2017.**

„To live authentically according to the word of God and to spread the Gospel“ was the leitmotiv of the Austrian presidency. We put this year’s conference directly within the developments all over the world and the consequences, which arise due to certain behaviour of different groups of societies worldwide. We chose for this year’s General Assembly the theme:

**„Searching for Roots“**

The reasons for this you could have read in the General Assembly’s paper distributed to all delegations. It sounded maybe cumbersome, but I felt it necessary to try to go to the forgotten depth of our belief and our responsibilities. Having finished my ideas and to entrust it to the paper, I first spoke with my Military Bishop. He always is the one clarifying the main challenge I try to develop. Comprehensively supported by my Secretary General we were able to propose to you an ambitious program with excellent speakers.

With all the excellent speakers and you delegates, I felt it must be possible, to search into the depth of our ideas, and to contribute together to the results of our conference.

We travelled twice to Rome for preparing the conference, thanks to the excellent connections of Military Archbishop Marciànò and Vicar General Angelo Frigerio I got the opportunity to talk to three Cardinals and the Head of Cabinet of the Italian Armed Forces.

Exceptionally for me was the opportunity to talk more than one hour to H.E. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Vatican, giving me the space to inform him intensively about AMI and its goals and work. He was really interested and I hope that in this case a special and very important task, helping AMI for the future, was done.

At least we found excellent speakers for this conference in Rome. I am convinced that up to the Italian Minister of Defence, who I invited to speak to us, is known today, because she sent her representative the Honourable General Domenico Rossi, Deputy Secretary of Defence.

Other lecturers during our conference were H.E. Cardinal Ravasi, H.E. Archbishop Tomasi, Professor de Wit, General Nordio, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, Angelo Frigerio, Mike Terry and of course, Domenico D'Ortenzi.

One of the highlights of the week was the so-called "Spettacolo", organised by the Italian Military Ordinariate on Tuesday evening in the Pantheon. H.E. Mons Santo Marciano, Archbishop of the Military Ordinariate of Italy, invited many important stakeholders, among which the Military attachés, stationed in Rome, to this divine concert given by the Polyphonic Choir and Orchestra of the Vicariate of Rome and directed by Mons. Marco Frisina.

Assisting the general audience on Wednesday morning was another absolute highlight during our conference in Rome. We had the opportunity to see the Holy Father from very near by and President Norbert Sinn and SecGen Nelleke Swinkels explained that we are Catholic lay people and soldiers from 16 nations worldwide and that we work for the Christian vision of life within the armed forces. He told us to stay strong and asked to pray for Him. We handed over to him a small gift of appreciation, including our current booklet about the 2016 conference in The Netherlands.

And now we arrived on today afternoon. At this moment it is necessary to say THANK YOU!

Thank you to:

- Archbishop Santo Marciànò
- Vic Gen Angelo Frigerio
- Secretary Don Santo Battaglia.

They made all these marvellous and beautiful encounters possible. I say thank you to all people of the Italian Armed Forces supporting our conference, and all people not named and working somewhere in the background.

A special thank you to:

- My Secretary General, her team, my vice presidents, and our ecclesiastical assistant, father Patrick Dolan;
- Colonel Domenico D'Ortenzi , who is the head of the Italian Host Nation team and our new Secretary General;
- All the delegates, who joined us this year, coming from 16 different nations.

I thank you for all your work, your happiness and your patience with me, asking you to work maybe more than you had expected during our conference.

Until the 1 of January 2018 I am still your president. Therefore, from y point of view, a lot of things are remaining and should be done until the end of the year:

- We will put together all the content and the results of this conference and produce our conference DVD;
- We will put together the essential documents of the conference and edit the booklet about this years' conference.
- We will prepare our final visit to the Vatican and also to the Italian Military Ordinariate and PASFA, (Association for Spiritual Assistance of the Armed Forces), an Italian organisation working with the Military Ordinariate and who's representatives were present in the Pantheon
- We will undertake the initial steps for our conference in 2018 so that the new presidency can start working. I already can announce that the conference shall take place in Croatia, October 14 to 19, 2018. More details will follow later.

**This is the end of part one, thank you so much everyone! I would like to give to you all my compliments: you made my work easy!**

**Part two:**

**Talking about 6 years of Austrian presidency.**

**“Quidquid agis, prudenter agas et suspice finem »**

“ Whatever you do, do it wisely and consider the end” is going back on a fable of Aesop, but one can use it as a leitmotiv for acting in any case.

Never convinced of myself, that I do my work, and take my responsibilities in a right way, I almost every evening think about what I have done and what mistakes I might have done – and how I could correct it. Or, sometimes you be asked and have to think which answer is expected, the wrong – the right, a bitter truth or just something polite. Sometimes, saying the plain (subjective) truth can be a mistake too. Or I tried to take decisions that allowed me to see myself in the mirror every morning.

Above is just as an introduction, please allow me to speak now about 6 years of AMI presidency.

In 2010 when my wife Ida and me travelled to Berlin and tried to explain to Nelleke that I could not be the future president of AMI for several reasons. But my Military Bishop at that time said to me please „Do it“ and so I did. A second term was not planned, but again, the Military Bishop said „Do it!“ It was my decision, which I took with pleasure and happiness. From the elections, on the Philippines in 2011, I just remembers that father Pat, first time with us, blessed me before starting to speak to the audience. In fact I needed his moral support more times than he did mine.

I had a team, which changed after the first period: Michael Jedlicka left, Fritz Aflenzer came new onboard. Nelleke, Jan and Herman were already the term before members of the execom and thus I found experienced and excellent performing friends supporting the work of the presidency!

One person I like to mention especially: our current Military Bishop, our former ecclesiastical assistant: Werner Freistetter. Almost every time he found time for me and my problems or questions. He was very important for me to understand the functioning of the Vatican better. He helped me to solve all the intellectual challenges I found when working out themes and preparing our conferences. I feel he is a personal friend and hope that he will stay as such, even in my non-AMI-future.

I inherited, as the president; already reconstruction sites especially the question of being an NGO, as wished by the Holy See. We worked hard on it several years and it became more complicated as expected. We tried to find a seat in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands; it did not work for national reasons. At least our Netherlands friends found the spot where we could get in: we now are an NGO, seated in the NL. Unfortunately there is a huge difference between being one and working as one. We looked for, and found, support at the permanent Mission of the Holy See in Geneva, which opened the doors to other NGO's. I tried to get into nearer contact with the Holy See's mission to the International Organisations in Vienna and the OSCE. Until now it was not always successful. I contacted also the Order of Malta, strongly connected with the Holy See, but without usable results up to now.

In the past six years we worked hard to broaden our basis by finding new members or bringing back old ones. That worked in a certain way. Italy is a very good example, but we lost also a few.

My first visit at the Vatican, being presented as the new elected president, was just a „Wow“ moment. Of course I had been in Rome several times before, as a tourist, but it was the first time I stepped into the Vatican Palace. It was impressive, although we sometimes got the impression of being just an irritating appendix to something like lay people. Luckily the situation changed in the course of time. Today we find open doors, cardinals and bishops speaking with, and listening to us. We are showing the flag and bring in our experience on Military issues.

My Secretary General, Nelleke, was and is very different and I had to learn to deal with her and to understand her way solving problems. It is for sure not the Austrian way, but I became familiar with it and I learned that it could be better to say how things are and how you think directly from the very first moment.

Jan van Lieverloo worked very often in the background but gave often special and important input, concerning how to develop the upcoming conference by finding out names of possible lecturers. And of course, if our ecclesiastical assistant was not able to join us, Jan gave us his advice concerning ecclesiastical matters.

Herman Vriesema became a good friend. Always calm, but working very hard and accurate, as Ans, his marvellous wife, told me many times.

My first vice president Fritz is very busy in his military job; I can say every time I tried to call him, he was abroad, but also he helped me quite a lot.

The same is to be said about Markus. I have been knowing him for a long time, learned that he is an excellent organizer, we spent many times together and passed one pilgrimage to Rome under his lead. Thank you very much for your work!

What work did the Executive Committee, during all these years?

We organised conferences in Slovenia, Belgium, Slovakia, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy. We prepared the soil for the next year's conference in Croatia and hopefully 2019 in Kenya.

We found new countries like the USA, Australia, and Spain again, Croatia and the United Kingdom. We tried to get into contact with Canada, South Africa, South Korea, Poland France, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Hungary and CELAM (Bishop Conference of South America). Unfortunately we lost Portugal, France, and Switzerland.

And what have I done as a president?

Lots of things a president does! I wrote several hundreds of letters to people all over the world, sending them our Jubilee book. I produced articles for our homepage, and I edited the booklets we published. I organized the production of the DVD's. I presented AMI to the public by holding lectures in several countries, and I tried to get into contact with the UN and the OSCE. I kept in contact with many Bishops so that AMI would not fall into oblivion.

I am very happy that I am married with Ida, already for 44 years, starting our 45<sup>th</sup> year just few weeks ago. She supported me all the time, and encouraged me in my work. Thank you Ida!

Someone asked me what to do after AMI?

Yes it will be a big hole for the moment and will produce a gap in my life. But I am sure that it will be filled up with other interests because Ida and I have so much in common: running our house and gardens, meeting our friends more than before, taking care for our children and grandchildren, support them.

I suppose we will travel, trying to read all the books in our library, doing sports.

Yes, Ida and me, we will miss you all, and we will miss AMI. It formed an essential part in our life during the last twenty years, which cannot be denied and forgotten. You all became friends to us, and if possible – stay friends!

I personally wish you all the best for your future.

I wish AMI a marvellous future, and I hope that the responsible people in the Roman Catholic Church will recognize the importance of having a direct connection into that strange body called “Armed Forces”.

A body also able to translate the way military can act, into normal civilian language. A body to spread the knowledge that military are regularly, normal people with normal pleasures and worries, forming part of our respective societies and cultures.

I would like to end my closing address by giving all my best wishes to Vice Admiral Matthieu Borsboom and his just elected new team of the Executive Committee. I am convinced that they will transfer the message of AMI as well as we did. Good luck to all!

Thank you very much for your attention!