

WMA and the right to conscientious objection - message of FIAMC and FEAMC presidents

30 September 2022

The World Medical Association (WMA) holds its annual General Assembly from October 5-8 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Berlin. For that Occasion, the presidents of both the World- and the European Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC and FEAMC) have written a letter, expressing their concern on the right to Conscientious Objection without onward (or maybe a mandated) referral, for physicians.

Brussels/Vatican City, 30 September 2022

To Dr Heidi Stensmyren, President of the World Medical Association (WMA), Dr. Osahon Enabulele, President Elect. Dr. David Barbe, Immediate Past-President, Dr. Otmar Kloiber, Secretary-General.

Dear Dr Stensmyren, Enabulele, Barbe and Kloiber, the WMA Council and Executive,

As president of the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC), in concert with the president of the European Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FEAMC), Prof. Dr. Vincenzo Defilippis, I wish you an inspiring and successful Conference in Berlin in liaison with the German Medical Association.

We are a global Physician's Organization with 80+ National Association members. We share your vision that the International Code of Medical Ethics (ICME) should provide a global framework to ensure compassionate and ethical medical care for patients worldwide and help banish torture and degrading treatment. The ICME should offer support and guidance to Medical Practices at personal, team, organizational and national levels. Moreover it should also inform and illuminate Government and Legal Processes at local and national levels.

The WMA was born of the tragedy of the Second World War and the complicity of fellow Physicians from the prosperous, well educated and deeply cultured centre of Europe. Some FIAMC colleagues lived through these times, most learnt from the media and a few from family, friends or patients experience.

What if Conscientious Objection (CO) had practically been available to Physicians of that time? Could CO sow seeds of doubt in others "who were just following orders", when the Nazis started killing those with learning and other disabilities? Pastor Niemoller recanted, for he wasn't a Communist, Socialist, Trade Unionist or Jew but "then they came for me and there was nobody left to speak for me".

Seventy-five years later there remain multiple conflicts leading to torture and ill treatment of humans especially by Authoritarian regimes. The treatment of the Uyghur people and others in China demonstrates this. Complicit physicians must have some ethical notions but no conscience? Conscientious Objection has a wider role than perceived.

Conscientious Objection is paramount to the Medical Practice of Physicians with diverse beliefs, notably even in cohorts of Physicians approving of Assisted Dying/Euthanasia since few are prepared to actually do the killing.

We urge the WMA to ratify the compromise paragraph of the ICME agreed to at the International Expert Committee in Washington D.C., in August 2022. It maintains the right to Conscientious Objection without onward (or maybe a mandated) referral.

*Prof. Dr. Bernard Ars, MD. PhD.
Professor of ENT Surgery,
President FIAMC*

*Prof. Dr. Vincenzo Defilippis, MD. PhD.
Professor of Internal and Forensic Medicine,
President FEAMC*